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A CAGED BIRD

The Romantic Biography of
Empress Elizabeth of Austria

by Maureen Fleming
(*Mrs. Larry Rue*)

Number XVII

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PART ONE

The Fledgling

C H A P T E R I

SISI'S RAINBOW

. . . So this rainbow looked like hope,
Quite a celestial kaleidoscope.

BYRON.

A straight-backed little girl sat astride her pony chatting with a tall man in Bavarian highlander costume, who rode beside her.

"Mama says those little bastards of yours will never be allowed in our house again, and I do love them so much, Poppie," the child exclaimed. Then, trailing off into a wistful vein, she added, "I'll miss them—'specially Bubi and Madi—they were such nice playmates."

The suggestion of tears in her lovely dark eyes quickly disappeared as the picturesque figure, her father, reassured her.

"Don't worry, Sisi Liebling. Your mother can cackle all she pleases. As long as I am there, they will be more than welcome."

An elfish twinkle lit up his swarthy handsome face as he continued whimsically, "And now how about you and I riding over to visit Bubi and his Mama?"

For answer Sisi spurred her pony enthusiastically. Together they trotted along the path that led from the castle grounds along the shores of Lake Starnberg. After the first outburst of speed they punctuated the tempo of their horse's hoof-beats with snatches of conversation that were confidences in themselves.

"Remember always, Sisi, that my love children will remain as much a part of my family as your mother's children are."

A CAGED BIRD

"But, Poppie, am I not your love child? You always say I'm your favourite." The eager sunburned face turned beseechingly to his.

"Gott im Himmel, mein Kind, will you never understand how precious you are to me? But then I keep forgetting how young you really are."

Princess Sisi was the only one of his eight strictly legitimate children for whom Duke Maximilian Joseph, Prince of the Bavarian Royal House, felt even a traditional affection. To him, she was dearer than any of his illegitimate flock scattered about the Bavarian countryside, each a monument to the beauty of the peasant damsel who held such a warm place in the Duke's ample heart.

The Duke's heart was an everlasting horn of plenty from which he poured forth his affection on the peasants of the countryside. As to his material fortune, it had suffered a deflation which made financial embarrassment a chronic condition. Depression in the family coffers, however, worried him very little. He scattered what there was of his fortune among those perennially needy members of his different and assorted families, on his host of poor artist friends, and on those occasional voyages in which he took such delight.

They were nearing their destination, a tiny toy town in Bavaria. The market was set up along the main street. Here were Bavarian highlanders in their green jackets and antelope skin shorts, their bright knitted socks and "shaving-brush" whiskers sticking jauntily in their pointed felt hats. Here were fresh-complexioned mountain maids in flowered cotton dresses and spotless aprons. Bargaining was in progress. Prospective purchasers pinched the naked chicken. Fat geese waddled around the heavy studded boots of the market women to be sold after a good-natured kind of bartering. Here was a garden variety of flowers and

fruits and vegetables. And here a variety of customers that included Duke Max himself as he dismounted to shop for his favourite and his little ones.

Jolly Duke Max and his inseparable Sisi were beloved the countryside over. Their ride was a procession of curtsies. The good folk doffed their hats, grinned cheerily, and showered blessings on their "Dear Highnesses."

There were embraces and joyful exclamations, when they at last arrived at a miniature dwelling done in bright colours where Bubi, Madi and their Mama lived.

In a low-ceilinged room, with its shiny floors, spinning-wheel, window-boxes, huge rosary hanging over the door, presided the golden haired "Mama" surrounded by her offspring. An atmosphere of cheery simplicity brightened the place, and the Duke felt really at home after the noisy splendour and the quiet intrigue of his castles. Sisi and the children ran out to play. Max and his sweetheart were alone.

Later in the day—three o'clock was dinner-time in Bavaria—every one sat down to a hearty meal. This would be the prelude to a house custom—Max would entertain on his zither a group heavily reinforced by neighbours. He was a famous zither player to his public, and Sisi, in her ardent devotion to her father, loved as much to watch him as to listen to him.

Max was tall, good-looking, with the dark hair and eyes of the Wittelsbachs, the reigning family of Bavaria. His usual costume was that of the Bavarian highlanders. He shone to advantage in his short, green-trimmed jacket, soiled buckskin shorts, bright green woollen hose and hobnailed boots. On the back of his nobly shaped head perched jauntily a green, pointed hat with a cock feather and a twisted cord.

To Sisi this would have been just one more of the happy carefree days she spent with her father had not

a heart-breaking incident occurred which was never to be erased from her memory. For the admiration of the crowd she had mounted her spirited pony to show her *repertoire* of stunt riding. Suddenly obeying a wild impulse, she set her spurs to and began galloping toward the woodland at a furious pace.

Like a flash her father took chase. He saw to his horror that her pony was out of control. A moment later Sisi was catapulted into a merciful haystack. The pony ended his mad charge against a stone fence—with neck broken.

Crying bitterly and clinging to her father, she vowed never to love another horse as she loved Punch. Duke Max lifted the child into his lap. No one understood this little wildling of his as he did. His heart ached at her sorrow. But his own heartache came from a cause even deeper than the present loss of the pony. It came from the reflection that Sisi was destined in life to suffer through her wildness and through those she loved. She would strain at the bit—perhaps run blindly into a stone fence—for she would love people like Punch, the thoroughbred. And when these kindred spirits ran to destruction Sisi would be left to suffer.

"There, there," he whispered to her gently, as he wiped her eyes, straightened up her frock, kissed her and begged her to be brave.

With a last few convulsive sobs she stopped crying. Then she was lifted tenderly to her father's horse to ride before him.

So mounted the two rode back to the village to say "Auf Wiedersehen" to the anxious assembly that was awaiting what they feared would be sad news.

Upon spying the little figure a cry of thankfulness went up from their lips. Thank God, no harm had befallen the precious Sisi.

Duke Max kissed his sweetheart and their progeny. With a word of paternal warning to the little ones and a gay compliment to their mother, he swung into the

saddle with Sisi, and together they were lost in the darkening forest toward Possenhofen. A light summer shower had freshened the forest and it was twilight time—the hour he loved best.

The passionate love of nature which was so much a part of her father had been inherited by Sisi. It was a love unsatisfied by the mere beholding. Nature had a power and a being with which they both longed to be as one. This mutual love contrived to bring her into a closer contact with nature than most children of her time. Like her father, she wanted to touch beautiful things—tree-trunks—to lie in the branches and swing from them—to fondle and kiss animal pets—to ride spirited horses until her taut muscles ached.

"Mama will never understand why I am so sad about my pony," Sisi confided as they drew closer homewards. "I hate to go to that Court party to-morrow. How I despise wearing those starched dresses and being took to those Courts."

"Don't blame you, darling. She won't get me to them. She's tried for years, but I've disgraced her so often she's finally given up. If I had my way you'd never go to them either, Liebling. That's another stupid idea of hers, starting you children in the game while you're so young."

"But if only this once I didn't have to go."

"Then we won't go home at all to-night, darling. Might as well be killed for a sheep as a lamb."

With that he turned his horse off the road and up the mountain-side, much to Sisi's relief. She knew he was headed for an old cow-herd's hut where they would spend the night under the stars, as they had done on so many other occasions. And the next day they would remain until it was too late for her to be "took" to Court.

The cow-herd warmly welcomed them and shared his black bread, cheese and sour milk, the only items on his bill of fare.

In payment the Duke assumed once more his role of zither player extraordinary until Sisi began nodding to the cool breezes rustling out of the forest. The Duke and his daughter sat listening a few moments to the lulling tinkle of the cow-herd; then they rolled into their blankets to slumber.

It was twilight time next day before they started home once more. Again a fresh sparkly shower had come and gone, leaving the woods more vernal and fragrant, and in the sky a gorgeous rainbow. "A rainbow," Duke Max had once declared, "is a sure sign of good luck." Sisi was to carry the superstition through life with her.

"The rainbow—the rainbow, Poppie!" She greeted the sight ecstatically with clasped hands.
"Does it mean I get my wish?"

"Naturally—you saw it first and that is an especially good sign. But what is your wish, Sisi?"

"You know what it is, Poppie—what I've wished for ever since you took me to the circus last year in Munich. I wish I shall be Queen of the Circus."

"Gott im Himmel, Liebling, don't ever mention that to your Mama if you love your Poppie. What a scene Ludoveca would make!"

A touching story was related to Sisi's governess when the bedraggled little girl arrived home that evening. And that practical though faithless busybody lost no time in relating it to the Archduchess Ludoveca upon her return home from the Court ball. Morning dawned with one more of the many marital set-to's featuring the private life of Duke Max and his spouse.

"Ugh, what a simply terrible way to educate a Princess," the irate Frau sputtered. "Perfectly disgusting! Why, you are bringing her down to your level—she'll never be anything but a gypsy. Mein

Gott, to think I should have married a creature like you!"

Experience had instilled indifference deep in the Duke's sturdy frame. The tirade provoked nothing more than a contemptuous grunt. His wife had begun this type of harangue on her marriage day and would continue it until the day on which he died—at the ripe old age of eighty-one—during all of which time they resided under the same roof.

The country-side was well acquainted with the story of the marriage up at the big house. The father of Ludoveca was King Maximilian Joseph I of Bavaria, who had a propensity for marrying off his daughters, all six of them, so unhappily, in fact, that they were called "the six unhappy sisters."

Duke Max, a mere cadet in the line of the Wittelsbachs, could hardly refuse his sovereign's wish that he marry his daughter, regardless of the fact that he had conceived a loathing for her at first sight. It had been literally a marriage of compulsion. Ludoveca was so ungrateful as to go to the very altar weeping bitterly.

Max had likewise acted characteristically. He had informed his bride, the world and the Church itself that neither God nor love had anything to do with this union. To be short, he was entirely ungrateful for the honour bestowed upon him by the old King. Royal brides and grooms were guilty of rank discourtesy should they presume the right to direct their own fate. Duke Max had acquiesced to a lifetime that never deviated from the precedent set by the nuptials. They lived unhappily ever after at the castle of Possenhofen on the shores of Lake Starnberg, with variations of short visits to their castle in Munich.

Between exciting quarrels, pitched battles and sullen silences, they spent the long winter nights together in the same big bed, and Ludoveca brought forth eight

children before the mismates decided to live on different floors of their establishment.

The daughter of Maximilian Joseph I had married the lame duck, according to her story, while her five sisters had made fitting and proper marriages.

Karoline, the eldest, was the third wife of Emperor Franz of Austria. Elizabeth married Frederick Wilhelm IV who sat on the throne of Prussia. Amelia married King Johann of Saxony; Marie married Frederich August of Saxony; dear sister Sophie—in Ludoveca's opinion the most fortunate of the lot—married that poor *cretin*, Franz Charles of Austria, by whom she had Franz Joseph, who at the age of eighteen became Emperor of Austria.

Archduchess Ludoveca never lost an opportunity to hurl her thunderbolts.

"Well, what of it?" Duke Max would wearily inquire. "Kings mean nothing in my life. I'm an artist! I create! My poems and books will be read and keep me alive in the hearts of the world after all your wretched kings have gone to their forgotten graves."

Max never developed an inferiority complex, despite the perpetual disapproval of Ludoveca. In fact the Duke considered himself the cheated party. For a great big zither player like him, who had written poetry, and a book on his wanderings in Syria, Africa and Arabia, under the pen-name of "Phantast"—the best was none too good.

Ludoveca would have considered Shakespeare himself unworthy of the littlest finger of a king. Yet here was her husband—the iconoclast—he dared to call them "wretched"! Her sharp tongue never missed a chance to impress on his legitimate children the immensely inferior lineage of their father, who, not even from a Royal branch of the family, was only a Duke "in" Bavaria. It made an enormous difference—Sisi alone refused to be impressed.

Regarding the "little bastard" element which was a by-product of the dukely activity, the seven children took sides with their mother, snubbing them when they came to the castle and causing them every possible unpleasantness. Duke Max retaliated by ordering each of his legitimate children—Sisi excepted—to ask his permission before coming into his private apartment at the castle, while his beloved illegitimates were free to come in at any time, and to stay as long as they pleased.

The Wittelsbach line was a predominantly eccentric one. They were either mad or very clever. The most famous Wittelsbach was a boy, born during Sisi's eighth year. At the age of eighteen he was to become King of Bavaria and was to go down in history as "The Mad King of Bavaria." Even now Sisi could stand on the shore of Lake Starnberg and see the island which one day would be called by this young King "The Isle of Roses." In her wildest dreams Sisi could never imagine what a strange friendship would one day develop between her and this Mad King of Bavaria.

Sisi, by right of her mother's family tree, was christened "Her Highness, the Princess Elizabeth Amalie Eugenie, Duchess in Bavaria," of the Bavarian Royal house. In spite of such a send-off in an aristocratic age the Princess remained Sisi, the child of her father. They were both gypsies at heart. He fondly hoped that his Sisi would wander through life in wild freedom like some strange sweet dryad of the Bavarian woodlands. Ludoveca, saddled with the worries attached to the upkeep of Possenhofen Castle and a pretentious establishment in Munich, and with one consuming ambition—great marriages for her children—left the "wildling" Sisi out of her calculations.

Little did any of them dream what the crucible of

fate held in store for Sisi. Her legitimate brothers and sisters and those born without benefit of clergy would have laughed loud and lingeringly if anyone had said that their tomboy Sisi would one day be "Her Majesty, Elizabeth, Empress of the Holy Roman Empire of Austria and Queen of Hungary" . . . that her chapter in the history of Central and Eastern Europe would be one of the most glamorous of a most colourful age.

A clairvoyant might have seen in this boyish, sun-tanned maid the radiant young Empress who startled all of Europe with her daring rebukes to convention, her escapades, her spectacular love affairs. In days when kings ruled by "divine right" she was to become a liberal. When special privilege was a religion, her heart would beat for the downtrodden and persecuted. She would be a humanitarian before her time. She would become a great beauty, an æsthetic, another Magdalene, a rebel angel of mercy, a beloved prophetess, more psychic, more accurate than any of the second-sighted gypsies. She would foresee that one day the Red Flag would wave in Vienna; she would predict that in a not far distant future the majesty, might and power of the Hapsburgs would disappear. Such portends would have seemed mad, impossible, to Sisi's family.]

The ordinary observer at Possenhofen would have beheld only an active child, whom her governess had just called a "dirty little ragamuffin," and who, instead of being apologetic seemed rather pleased at her reputation of being "that little outlaw." She would forget and then recall her sorrow over Punch; and as for acting like a "little tramp," she courageously told her mother that she was looking forward to the next time.

Altogether a self-willed, ultra-modern child; more

1937 than 1837. She walked regally, gazed daringly upon forbidden things, exulted in the companionship of her illegitimate brothers and sisters. Her life was to be motivated by a futuristic melody, a melody akin to our classic jazz, a symphony in freedom, a medley of wild beauty, of soft saxophones crooning sadness, of faint, intangible desires, clashes of demoniacal disturbances, the anguish of unrealized love trailing off in softer harmony to the dulcet peace that follows love's consummation. Strong, brave song of eternal youth, unshackled, eternally at war with convention, that . . . that was the theme song of the life of Sisi. That was the promise in Sisi's Rainbow !

CHAPTER II

DUKE MAX GROANS

It was the month of August, 1853. Sisi had grown into a tall, exquisitely formed maid of sixteen. Her beauty was still the strange, dark-eyed, faunlike beauty of the Wittelsbachs. The regal poise of her head, her soft, low modulated voice, her gift for languages were constant sources of pride to her governesses. Her deficiency in mathematics and all "book-learning," her superhorsemanship, her love of nature and music and poetry were the constant pride of her father. She remained his inseparable, adoring companion. They walked, swam and climbed mountains together. Even when he and his "zither instructor," Johann Petzmacher, went camping for a few days with the foresters and woodchoppers, far up in the mountains, Sisi often went with them.

Sisi's father was forty-four. He had preserved the slim athletic figure of a boy. Brown hair growing from a point on his unlined brow, sun-tanned, vigorous—his dark eyes glowing with eager youthfulness.

The two companions were in the garden of Possenhofen Castle. The Duke strumming upon his zither, Sisi idly petting the soft breast of a pink-footed dove. Perfect comrades, they pursued silently their separate thoughts and dreams on this lazy summer afternoon. Sisi cried out softly, kissed the wing of her dove as it fluttered from her hand.

"I want to kiss the birds as they fly, Poppie!"

The Duke stopped playing. "I know you do, Liebling—I know—I hope you will always—want to.

Listen to this poem of Blake's." He improvised on his zither and recited to her:

He who holds to himself joy,
Doth the winged life destroy ;
He who kisses a joy as it flies,
Lives in Eternity's sunrise.

This poem captivated Sisi's imagination. She later committed it to memory. It became one of her favourite quotations.

"Poppie," she asked, "do you believe as Mama does that when I go out into the big world people will not like me unless I get to be like Mother and Hélène and wear tight corsets? Mama says I must begin to wear them now—I hate them."

"*Wurst!*"—those ideas are all *wurst*¹—it's all very well for most girls, for most people in the world—but you'll never be bridled by encasing yourself in tight corsets either mentally or physically—don't worry about that, darling."

"Poppie, you know, a gypsy told me that a regular Prince Charming was coming to woo me! She said it was going to be the most distinguished, important, sought-after prince in the whole world!"

"So?" And as if expressing a different after-thought, "So-o."

"I dream of him—sometimes!"

"Ach, Gott, precious—but that would be only natural." A tear formed in her father's eye unseen by Sisi. He transformed it into a poem telling of his poignant sadness at the realization of Sisi's maturity.

A week later, Ludoveca paid a visit to her sister Sophie, in Vienna.

The officious, energetic, intriguing Sophie had married the Archduke Franz Charles, second son of Emperor Franz I of Austria! Franz I used to start

¹ Baloney.

the morning by making a speech before each of his six horses prior to driving elegantly through the Prater behind them. His day was devoted to similar idiotic performances. The Court winked broadly, knowing that Sophie at the helm was breeding enough sons to give at least one single sane one to the throne.

Sophie's own health of mind and body seemed concentrated in her very first child, Franz Joseph, who developed in a satisfactorily normal way. She not only gave birth to Franz Joseph, but she continued to direct his destiny in matters private and political throughout her life.

Sophie had been called the only man in the Imperial Palace at Vienna. She extinguished a revolution in Central Europe. She gave intestinal fortitude to the easy-going, *Gemuellich* Austrian citizenry. She put Freiherr Von Kuebeck's famous system, "Sovereign Absolutism," into practice. She placed on guard the powerful Radetzky, Jellacic and Windischgraetz.

Up to the time that the selection of a wife for Franz Joseph became pressing, she had things all her own way, from the choosing of his wet nurse, round the cycle to the selection of his "*initiatrice*"—a female in whose arms the young Emperor was introduced to the current and accepted "*necessities*" of love. This ceremony was regarded as a matter of utmost importance in all the Royal families. When the Emperor was a scant eighteen, Sophie picked out a gorgeous blonde, buxom beauty from the Kremsier district, moulded in the Rubens type of voluptuousness.

The Kremsier district was inhabited by a hardy, energetic race of peasants of mixed Slav and Germanic blood whose women had supplied the best wet nurses to the nobility of many generations. There were a variety of *initiatrices* during the first few years of Franz Joseph's routine youth. All were of the same type—a type for which he was to show a marked preference during one very auspicious episode of his life. It could

never be said of Franz Joseph—that he had no mother to guide him.

When Franz Joseph had reached the age of twenty-three, after five years on the throne, the problem of selecting a wife for him presented itself. Sophie, waving aside his assembly of *initiatrices*, flirts and unclassified females, began to gaze in the crystal ball of matrimonial eligibilities.

Franz Joseph cast longing eyes on the lovely twenty-two-year-old widow of Archduke Ferdinand of Hungary, daughter of Joseph, Palatine of Hungary, the Archduchess Elizabeth. Sophie pounced down on them and their marriage dream was shattered.

Mentally spitting on her hands, Sophie sent for Ludoveca. The Amazon's mind was definitely made up as to who was to share the Royal bed. Franz Joseph would marry his first cousin, the eldest daughter of Ludoveca, the obedient, charming and religious Hélène. That was that.

The estimable Ludoveca was overjoyed at the tidings. Time and place were arranged by the dowagers for the meeting of the bridal party. It would be at the Archduchess Sophie's summer home in Ischl—a wooded place in Upper Austria.

It had been decided that Sisi would not accompany her family. Duke Max protested vigorously. The prospect of spending any time whatsoever with that "smug, bumptious Sophie," as Max called her, drove him into despair. He promised if his pet, Sisi, might come along to cheer him up, he would attempt to behave and enjoy what would otherwise be an abysmally dull proceeding—that of mating his eldest daughter to the "greatest catch of the Royal matrimonial market." With Sisi at his side, he assured his spouse, he would turn duty into pleasure and be a real social light. He even went to such lengths as to promise

to wear proper society clothes, and, wonder of wonders, leave his zither at home! Ludoveca finally consented to let Sisi come. Of just such stuff is history made!

.
The bouncing stage-coach journey from Possenhofen to Ischl gave father and daughter continuous opportunities for laughing at the serious, preoccupied faces of mother and daughter, Ludoveca and Hélène.

"Don't look so much like an old hen about to lay an egg!" The Duke smacked the Archduchess playfully on the knee. That pleasantry was lost on the good wife, but it brought peals of laughter from Sisi who would repeat it to one of her friends later. She would take the trouble to write a long letter in her pretty German handwriting about how really elegant Mama and Hélène looked.

"But how solemn! As if they were going to a funeral. Poppe and I enjoyed it and acted as if we were going to a circus. It was useless to cheer up those old dummies. They looked as if they had just eaten sour pickles—and they acted as if they had the tummy ache from them."

It was an unusually hot August day. The poor horses suffered intensely. Sisi helped her father and the groom while they were being watered. She was rewarded by a shower of slobber that left her soaking wet. And so with drenched shoes she climbed back into the carriage to be severely scolded by the Archduchess.

"A disgusting performance," her mother remarked. Sisi was to be sent home regardless of her father's wishes if she must act like a common gypsy.

At Ischl they were welcomed profusely by Sophie and the semi-idiotic husband, Archduke Franz Charles, who six years before had relinquished his rights to the

thione of Austria in favour of his son. Franz Joseph had not yet put in an appearance.

It was one of those secrets that only the Army, the Navy, and various individuals knew that the Emperor had remained with his sweetheart, the Hungarian Archduchess Elizabeth, until the last possible moment.

Archduchess Elizabeth's hatred of the "pious, plump, goody-goody" Hélène had affected Franz Joseph strongly. He was prejudiced against her from the start. He had met Sophie's choice before. At that time they had looked upon each other merely as cousins and friends. The Emperor had been polite—glad when the visit to Aunt Ludoveca and her children was over.

All the Emperor's younger brothers arrived before him—the handsome Archduke Maximilian, Archduke Louis Victor and Archduke Charles Louis. When Franz Joseph finally appeared, this seventeenth day of August, the day before his twenty-fourth birthday, it was with the attitude of a man who had a pleasure, not a disagreeable duty to perform. He wore the Field-Marshal's uniform, white tunic, epaulets of gold, rows of dazzling decorations, tight-fitting scarlet trousers moulded over strong shapely legs.

His handsome face was framed with reddish brown hair. Thick lashes and brows shaded keen, deep-set, blue eyes. His complexion was fresh, boyishly tanned and glowing with health. A small, silky moustache drooped about a sensuous mouth. His body was pliant and athletic. There were more reasons than the fact that he was the best Royal catch of the time for his being the dream of the ladies! Little wonder that Sisi, picking her way gracefully through the crowd, found him a vision of splendour and romance.

Meal-time found Sisi relegated to an out of the way corner with her governess. In the dining-hall the two

dowagers promoted their protégés in what was to be the welding of the two families.

Franz Joseph was the recipient of eager, covetous glances from Hélène, who shed an aura of perfection, to the inner satisfaction of the ominous Sophie. Franz Joseph stared at her uncomfortably.

According to the programme carefully made out for him the young Emperor was to go through the ceremony of asking Duke Max and Ludoveca for the hand of their daughter in marriage at a certain time after the feast had begun. As course followed course the tension grew. The Emperor looked as if he were unsuccessfully trying to swallow a pill. Boredom was not only in the air, it saturated the food. The hands of the clock near the door moved closer and closer to the appointed time. Not a suggestion of action! A scant few moments were left.

Duke Max was the first to crack under the strain. Sisi's laugh in the next room came to him as an elixir. Shifting about in his chair he called her to him. A radiantly happy, carefree maid broke in upon the glum assembly. In her white dress with its huge blue sash, Sisi looked a vision of virginal beauty.

Her dark laughing eyes gazed frankly into the keen troubled ones of Franz Joseph. Something clicked.

Alas for the best-laid plans of mice and men! For that moment, those of a master intriguer—went smashing! Franz Joseph ignored his mother's wishes for the first time in his life. For once he acted outrageously and on his own initiative.

The electrical atmosphere that had gathered about the transfixed group exploded. The Emperor, casting a significant glance at Hélène, excused himself and calmly asked Sisi if she would go for a walk with him in the garden.

A walk in the garden! Off they went, Sisi and Franz, leaving the family staring at each other in mingled

astonishment and chagrin; Hélène humiliated, Ludo-veca and Sophie prostrated, Franz Charles drooling—and Duke Max furious.

Franz Joseph discovered in one sweet breathless moment a new love and now all restraint slipped from him. He sought the little hand that seemed so natural in his. Together, laughing like joyous truants, they ran through the maze of paths.

"Let's go see the horses," Sisi ventured shyly.
"I love them—better than people."

Refreshing childlike frankness! It enslaved the Emperor. He joined in her enthusiastic praise of the thoroughbreds. He agreed with everything she said. And suddenly—his arm encircled her tiny waist.

Sisi escaped by a dexterous twist and ran like some frightened doe into the forest. Surprised, the Emperor ran after her. Fleet-footed Sisi easily outdistanced him. It was fun to hide from him—be caught by him?

In the rosy excitement he kissed her—ever so gently on her satin face—her brow—her dark velvet soft hair. He found her lovely mouth with his own. The small, taut body relaxed to him.

"It's you I love, Sisi—you only!"

The incredible, the eternally sweet, aroused in Sisi in these short few seconds the dormant woman. They sat down side by side in the woodland, a friendly background for a gypsy princess. They talked of life and—of love. Sisi at sixteen knew nothing of either. Franz Joseph on his twenty-fourth birthday, knew all there was to know. By twilight—the time Sisi loved best, they were betrothed.

Upon hearing from her son his intention to marry Sisi the Archduchess Sophie in turn became furious, outraged and tearful.

"I won't have it," she fumed. "That little chit

of sixteen—that little minx! She's a Wittelsbach through and through. Can't you see that? Hélène is like me, a fine, God-fearing girl who would make a splendid mother! Come now, Franz, listen to your mother and don't be foolish—why, I'm surprised at you!"

Sophie burst into tears. Ludoveca joined her. The cold, adamant expression in the youth's face was enough to make any one snifle. The pair of intriguers rapidly changed into damp dowagers.

Picking up steam, Sophie launched forth again. "Why, Franzie, you can't pick a wife like any ordinary footman! You are an emperor—not a common man. You have responsibilities, state responsibilities, on your shoulders."

This sally was drowned out by the wail of Ludoveca.

"Holy Mary, but my little Hélène is humiliated."

Cackle, cackle, cackle. For once in his life—that's all it meant to Franz.

Ludoveca retired. Die-hard Sophie commenced a new onslaught. They would "discuss the situation." She was determined not to emerge from the mêlée without flying colours.

The monstrous, forbidding, Victorian sitting-room of Sophie's suite was a fitting setting for a battle in defence of ideas preponderantly Victorian. They seemed to back her up, these Victorianisms, as she argued far into the night with her stubborn son.

She finished exactly where she had started. In the first shaky rays of dawn she summoned the Cardinal as a gesture of resignation. He arrived ready for a birth, a death, a substantial donation—for anything, in fact, but for what Sophie had to inform him.

As he entered the room he made the sign of the cross. The two figures sank deep in their chairs. Franz Joseph standing, smiled wearily, somewhat triumphantly. He believed his mother had acquiesced. But like the india-rubber man, Sophie always had a

few bounces left in her. She compressed her lips for one last assault.

"In the name of the Lord and the Holy Roman Empire of Austria," she addressed the Cardinal, "bring the Emperor to his senses!"

The Cardinal began to plead with the Emperor. His Majesty would be exceedingly wise to follow his saintly mother. He sprinkled holy water on the Royal head in hopes of washing away the stubborn inflexibility of will—to oust the devil in him.

Franz Joseph stuck to his guns. Hélène's whole personality was repulsive to him. Any young man can be firm in those circumstances.

Dawn shed a grey light on a colourful three. And with the dawn the curtain rang down on a victory and a defeat. The Cardinal solemnly blessed the betrothal of Sisi, the Princess Elizabeth, to Franz Joseph.

Sophie swooned.

Church bells pealed the next morning. The whole family went to Mass. It was a dramatic moment. A crestfallen, slightly bedraggled-looking Sophie gave the smiling, shining Sisi precedence at the door of the church, executing a deep Court curtsey. A magnificent Archduchess done up in voluminous silken skirts paid homage to a sixteen-year-old maid. Sisi walked regally before her. It was then that the congregation realized that Sisi and not Hélène was to become "Empress of Austria."

The news rocked the kingdom. Newspapers were filled with the story. In the official organ of the Government, the *Wiener Zeitung*, for August 18, 1854, appeared the following:

"His Imperial and Royal Apostolic Majesty, the Emperor Franz Joseph I—with the consent of His Majesty King Maximilian II of Bavaria—was betrothed in Ischl to the Princess Elizabeth Amalie

Eugenie, Duchess in Bavaria, daughter of Their Highnesses, Duke Maximilian Joseph and Duchess Ludovica, a Princess of the Bavarian Royal House. May the blessing of the All Mighty God . . ." and so forth.

Franz Joseph's exalted position did not impress Duke Max. He even held it against him. A husband for Sisi must be considered on the basis of manhood. To him, Franz Joseph was just one more of those conceited, red-breeched lieutenants who with the help of God and a mob of Army officers had turned Austria into a military state. The Press was choked. The people overtaxed. Money was squandered on the Army because he, Franz Joseph, Rex, was a tin soldier with as much soul as a tin soldier. The young Emperor had signed 2000 death-warrants before he was twenty-four years old. He had reigned five years. In the minds of many he was just an unlovable, red-trousered subordinate into whose hands had fallen by chance the dominion of an Empire.

"I wouldn't marry him if I were you, Sisi," Duke Max cautioned. "He is just an impatient, inconsiderate, unimaginative ass—from all I've heard. You'd do well to forget him."

Rather bewildered with what had resulted from her effort to get her father's opinion, Sisi rested in the shadow of a doubt. Perhaps it would be better to reconsider her decision to marry someone who might be impatient and inconsiderate. But the shadow was dispelled by a bigger shadow . . . that of Franz Joseph. The Hawk of the Hapsburgs hovered invisibly over Sisi as, bending in a courtly bow, Franz Joseph touched her hand with his soft lips.

Nothing unimaginative nor inconsiderate about him as far as she could see. Her eyes met those of her father, over the golden blond head of her suitor. But

this time the *rappoport* between father and daughter failed to function.

Ludoveca was inclined, in the final analysis, to deem the situation satisfactory. After all, the sort of private empire building she did continually for her offspring must take precedence over the loving sympathy that a real mother would feel for Hélène and her humiliation. After all, she could not forget that her child had captured one of the greatest crowns in Europe. For the first time her own unfortunate mariage, she felt, was vindicated.

If Ludoveca had had her way she would have married, instead of Duke Max, the Prince of Braganza, who became King of Portugal. Probably she would have been a happy wife under that roof . . . though just as probably not so fortunate a mother. But now, so far as her daughters were concerned, she felt herself the most fortunate mother in Europe. Franz Joseph preferring Elizabeth to Hélène wasn't so important after all. He had taken one of her daughters. What more could she ask? Now she was the envy of all the mothers with marriagable daughters in the whole of Europe.

Sisi's catch would be a precedent for her other daughters. She had less control over her sons.

Years later she would look with pride at the list of marriages of her daughters, but not her sons. The line-up was impressive enough for even a marriage-maker of Ludoveca's calibre. This is it: Louis, the eldest boy, surrendered Royal rights to marry an actress, Fraulein Henriette Mendel, much to the delight of Max and Sisi; Carl Theodor, a great doctor, was better known as "Goosie," and married his cousin, Princess Sophie of Saxony; Max Emanuel, the youngest of them all, called "Booby," remained single; Hélène, the eldest girl, evidently doomed to

unhappiness, married the Crown Prince of Thurn and Taxis; Marie, Queen of Naples, was deposed, losing the land and crown she had obtained from her late husband; Mathilde, nicknamed the " Sparrow," became Countess Trani, marrying the brother of the King of Naples; Sophie, the youngest girl, became Princess of Bourbon-Orleans, Duchess of Alençon, only to meet tragic death in a bazaar fire.

Sisi, in Munich, went trousseau hunting. With all the money in the world at her disposal for the first time in her life, she moved about in a charmed circle. Max assisted.

" How do I look, Poppie? "

" Like a little faun, Empress, Liebling. You are just made for happiness."

" Why, Poppie, that's a lovely remark! I know I shall be happy. Just think! Franz is so graceful. No one can kiss my hand so tenderly. And when he caresses my face it's just as nice as when Punch used to rub his soft nose in the palm of my hand. Think how nice it will be to have someone gently caress me like that every day. Like having a pet pony. But you look so serious and sad whenever we talk of my getting married."

" Serious and sad? Gott im Himmel! " The Duke exploded. " I hope you realize there is decidedly more than hand-kissing and pony-nuzzling in the marriage you are going into. . . . I mean different from just . . . that. . . ."

The Duke looked so miserably perturbed that Sisi laughed and kissed him.

" Of course I do, " Sisi said confidently. " It's ever so much more lovely . . . and sweet."

Duke Max groaned!

CHAPTER III

SCARLET TROUSERS

" May the blessing of the All Mighty God be vouchsafed to this betrothal, so fortunate and so full of promise to our dynasty and Empire. . . ."

FRANZ JOSEPH'S OFFICIAL GAZETTE.

Ludoveca was fussing and fuming over the final arrangements before the wedding party was to start for Austria.

Sisi and Duke Max were sitting in the garden of Possenhofen Castle drinking beer and eating frankfurters. Duke Max was warning Sisi that this bill of fare might not be regarded as proper for an Empress. There was nothing "heavy" about Elizabeth. Now seventeen, she was tall, slender and spritely, and yet she relished her Munich beer and frankfurters. The suggestion that she might not be permitted to have these when she became an Empress seemed absurd.

" As long as I am Queen, I will have beer and frankfurters, don't worry," she said.

The Duke made a grimace. He explained.

" You know, Sisi, there are many things that you and I have been doing that are not proper, according to Spanish etiquette, which is observed by the Austrian Court. You may have to give in to many things—manners, dress, even the matter of food and drink you put in your mouth. Empresses are expected to drink and eat something more refined than beer and frankfurters. You probably will become a wine fancier."

Sisi's laugh was loud and gay.

" Why, just let them tell me what I'm going to eat

and drink—I'll have them hanged! Whoever heard of such a barbarian country?"

"No country will forbid its people to drink beer," Max explained, "but the common people have rights and liberties that are denied members of the Royal Family."

To Max's delight, Sisi was insisting that nobody would dare to tell her what to do or what not to do, when Ludoveca came in to announce that it was time to go. There was much kissing and good-byeing. Sisi forgot no one, from the gardener and his wife to the boatman, the grooms, the governesses, the house servants, on down the list.

"Auf Wiedersehen! Auf Wiedersehen!"

"Auf Wiedersehen;" echoed through the garden.

In every village *en route*, in every market town, was heard the boom of guns. Bands played, people cheered; children sang.

Sisi and Duke Max went through a ceremony of leave-taking upon sighting Sisi's numerous half-brothers and sisters. Getting down from their carriage, father and daughter embraced the love children. Tears and kisses mingled copiously. Ludoveca sniffed and sneered and looked daggers that never reached their mark.

The ducal carriage proceeded with its passengers, charged with emotion—Ludoveca's triumph, Sisi's adolescent dreams, the inflated hopes of the marriageable sisters—and the ineffable sadness and apprehension of Duke Max.

The Danube steamer, *City of Regensburg*, awaited the party at Straubling. Down the beautiful "Blue Danube" sailed the wedding party to Linz. Beflagged river towns boomed cannon. As they arrived at Linz a multitude of bells began ringing. There were crowds of people in festal array. Linz was a riot of colour—the Austrian red and white, Hapsburg black and

yellow, mixing profusely. Generals in dazzling parade uniforms—lines of troops . . . standing at attention.

A delegation of townsmen was present to greet the seventeen-year-old Sisi. The Hymn of the Hapsburgs was played with crashing of cymbals and beating of drums. Emperor Franz Joseph, himself, stepped forward to welcome his bride-to be.

It was like a gay musical comedy, or a circus, to Sisi, who enjoyed playing the part of Queen. The wedding party spent the night at Linz.

Sisi fell asleep after she and her father had drunk a glass of dark Munich beer, which he had brought along, saying it was good for her nerves; incidentally also good for his own!

Next day brought forth another theatrical scene, Spring blossoms bedecked the trees this April day. The little river steamer *Franz Joseph* awaited the party. It was garlanded with roses from Schoenbrunn Palace and decorated with countless flags and much bunting. Young girls of noble family, dressed in white, strewed petals, walked beside them and sang sweetly as they embarked.

Franz Joseph and his entourage followed in another boat.

Silvery bells pealed from many little chapels as they sailed down the Danube towards Vienna. Past the monastery at Melk, through the loveliest part of Austria, the Wachau, Krems . . . on and on . . . past picturesque old castles, in a setting of spring flowers and scented trees, the bridal party steamed.

It was all so wonderful that suddenly Max let out a cheer, tossed his hat in the air and asked Johann Petzmacher to play a tune.

"Give us something gay, Johann! Let's get a little joy into this party!"

Ludoveca, in high indignation, protested. In answer Max began to whirl his spouse around the deck.

"None of that, my dear Ludoveca! We are going to be happy. This is a wedding, not a funeral."

Ludoveca's feathered hat slipped over on her ear. She puffed and panted in her tight corsets as the Duke danced her around.

Sisi, delighted, raced up, clasped hands with one of her brothers and did her wildest and prettiest steps and turns to the music that became gayer and gayer. They sang songs of the Bavarian highlanders. They refreshed themselves with beer. The mother and sisters were shocked. But the revellers ignored them.

"What fun!" cried Sisi. "Let's get the sailors to join us."

"A great idea," agreed Max. "Come on, you fellows, this is a happy fête day . . . nobody is dying."

"You're missing it, Mama," Sisi called out. "We're having a wonderful time."

"What will people think of the Emperor's father-in-law?" Ludoveca demanded, when she finally cornered her husband and daughter.

"They should be proud of him. Look at the Emperor's own father and then draw your comparisons," the Duke replied.

"Poppie, I'm more proud of you than any man in the world."

With that the dance began all over again. The Duke did a solo dance while Sisi kept time, stamping her little feet, swinging her hips and clapping her hands. They looked like a couple of gay peasants on a holiday.

More beer was served to everybody and everybody was happy except Ludoveca and a few of the other Archduchesses. They feared the story would get out and create a scandal. The story was whispered in Vienna. But Franz Joseph controlled the Press.

But what a scandal it would have created, not only in Austria but throughout all European Court circles, had the story been published that harum-scarum Sisi, carousing down the Danube, aided and abetted by the

notorious "Phantast," had so lightly regarded her approaching responsibilities, that she behaved like a peasant when she was on her way to become Empress of the stiffest and most formal Court in Europe!

Early that evening the ship docked at Nussdorf, a port of Vienna. It was the eve of the wedding, and a hectic one for Sisi.

Eight beautiful horses pranced before her carriage. She was driven to Schoenbrunn Palace in Hietzing, typical of the Franzian era, with its honey-coloured stone, its green shutters, its fourteen hundred and forty-one rooms—and not one bathroom! It had been an exhausting day for Sisi. Still breathless, she was bathed in a portable tub of perfumed water, which was carried into her boudoir, and afterwards she was quickly dressed by her deft and respectful ladies-in-waiting. She was to appear on the balcony and show herself standing beside the Emperor. Thousands of people were thronged outside the castle gates calling for their future Empress.

Suddenly there was an awed hush. A delicate, lovely figure in white appeared holding the arm of the boyish Franz Joseph. Two forms, like fragile pillars, were etched against the background of the castle's countless candle-lights. Thousands of voices cried out:

"Hoch! Hoch!"

In the foreground stretched the stately and formal gardens of Schoenbrunn. Countless lampions lighted the scene. All hearts were captured by Sisi's beauty. Just one glimpse of her, and she was declared the Liebling—the pride of a new country!

Popular superstition predicted that she would bring luck and prosperity to Austria. Spring-time was more than a season; its fragrance and promise seemed to be in every one's heart. Vivas and fêting went on

through the night while Sisi dreamed her last maiden dream.

The pomp and magnificence of the wedding festivities have been told in song and story. Newspapers of Europe carried columns on the event. Piles of documents in the archives to-day describe the ceremony in detail.

The coach of state was drawn by eight milk-white Arabian horses. Upon their heads nodded white ostrich plumes, their harness and reins were spangled with gold. Their manes were braided in red and gold cord. On either side walked magnificently attired footmen. Between the rear wheels of the coach was perched the golden eagle of the Hapsburgs with the Imperial apple and sceptre in his claws. The spokes of the wheels were of pure gold. Reubens had decorated the coach doors.

Framed against the richly embroidered, black velvet interior could be seen the dainty head of the seventeen-year-old Princess Elizabeth, beside the smugly smiling face of her proud mother, the pompous Ludoveca.

All the bells in all the churches of Vienna rang out joyously. More cannon thundered. Bands played loudly as the *cortège* proceeded along the streets crowded with cheering people. With a blare of trumpets the procession stopped at the new bridge which was dedicated by the passing of the Princess.

Here Elizabeth was welcomed by the *burgomeister* and the city council. The roadway was lined with spring flowers and orange blossoms. The wedding procession drove along to the main gate of the Hofburg, the Imperial Palace, where Franz Joseph and the Imperial family welcomed Elizabeth; then to the church.

Three thousand candles lighted the Augustine altars. For centuries this had been the chapel of the Hapsburg

fainly. It was hung with crimson and gold brocade and some of the famous Hapsburg Gobelins.

At the fanfare of the trumpets and the roll of the kettle-drums, the bridal party moved down the aisle. The mellow tones of the organ sounded as the exquisite Princess marched slowly to the altar.

She wore a white satin gown embroidered with silver. A wreath of white and red roses concealed the priceless diadem encircling her dark hair. A shawl of rose point covered her shoulders.

The Parisian costumes of the dowagers, the duchesses, the archduchesses, formed a feminine counterpart to the nobles and officers in full regalia. Hungarians and Poles outshone the others in silks and velvets, aigrets and jewels. In the background were crimson-robed cardinals and seventy bishops in purple. The high altar was banked with flowers and gleaming with jewelled candelabra.

Cardinal Rauscher pronounced the kneeling couple man and wife. Guns broke forth in thunder, bells pealed, drums beat, trumpets blared—and a seventeen-year-old girl walked up the aisle as Empress of one of the world's greatest empires.

The bridal supper was served on pure gold plate. After the feast Elizabeth was led to the throne where she sat beside her husband. Together they received the homage of their subjects.

It was all like a lovely play to Elizabeth. The sheer beauty and excitement of it overwhelmed her. She forgot about wanting to be queen of the circus! If only she might take the heavy crown off—might loosen the tight dress—but then, she knew, the play would be over.

It was half-past ten before the reception ended. Elizabeth was exhausted. She did not see the mincing courtiers whisper behind their hands to each other as they escorted the pair to the "inner apartments."

As she walked, leaning on Franz Joseph's arm, she

was happy. It would be pleasant to hear him tell her how pretty she was, to have him caress her lightly. Only she was really very tired. She would sleep like the princess in the fairy book . . . until he awakened her in the morning with a kiss.

In a shimmering gown trimmed with rose-point lace forming a long train, Elizabeth left the hands of her ladies-in-waiting with their blessing. She noted their alarmed expressions. She did tell them they looked as frightened as her father when he had said "good night."

Franz Joseph had given strict orders that every one retire. But the scandal spread swiftly through the Palace. Elizabeth had been found by her lady-in-waiting, sobbing hysterically.

"If you want to find favour with Her Majesty don't ever appear before her in red breeches," the Court whispered.

The idea was so absurd that the wits made spicy jokes about it . . . jokes which never reached the ears of His Majesty. He had hung people for less than that.

Sophie had been informed. She smiled knowingly and benignly on Elizabeth next morning and considered the agonized expression on the pale, sweet face as of no importance.

Yet that night changed the course of Elizabeth's life.

C H A P T E R I V

OLD SPANISH CUSTOMS

The fact that Elizabeth tried to close her door against him only made Franz Joseph love her the more. He tried in every way to win back her love and confidence. Jewellery, princely presents, ardent love notes availed him little. But Elizabeth was quick to use her hold over him in directing a more liberal policy towards his subjects.

The results were immediate. For the first time during his reign, Franz Joseph showed mercy to his subjects. Five hundred persons convicted of "High Treason" (which generally meant some trivial remark or deed considered against the Empire) were set free. This was followed by the suspension of the state of siege in Galicia, Hungary and the Voivodina.

Three women sentenced to death by the Hermannstadt court martial, the widows of the landowner Kenderessy zu Mikefalva, of Professor Torok and of Farmer Szentkiretyi, were practically snatched from the gallows by Elizabeth. They were to have been hung merely for remarks they had made "against the Government." And their guilt had not been proven of that. Such was the "absolutism" of Franz Joseph's reign . . . many were hung merely as suspects.

Elizabeth initiated what Sophie described as "an orgy of mercy." Sophie remarked in the presence of Cardinal Prince Archbishop Rauscher that law and order would be abolished if this little "Wax Doll of a Bavarian" was allowed her own way. But this time there seemed very little the old dowager could do about

it. She could only wait, she said, until Franz came to his senses. Meanwhile she determined to do her best to press Elizabeth into the mould of an Empress.

In this worthy effort Sophie had the co-operation of every one at Court with the exception of Franz Joseph. The latter, she reasoned, would be won over in a little time. It was to be a difficult task even for the major-domo Archduchess.

During the first important Court dinner given at the Hofburg, Elizabeth let it be known to every one that she was going to be herself. She appeared in a white satin, pearl-embroidered gown, her dark hair piled in coronal braids on her lovely head, her deep dark eyes glowing brilliantly.

Her sudden mischievous smile captivated every one.

"Please bring me a glass of beer," she ordered.

"A thousand pardons, Your Majesty, I don't believe I heard correctly."

"Beer . . . a glass of beer," she ordered.

The servant, red to the roots of his powdered wig, disappeared. The sweet lovely face turned toward Prince Schwartzenberg.

"I'm so thirsty . . . and nothing like beer for a thirst."

"Ahem," coughed the Prince politely. Hoping to guide "Her Majesty" into proper channels of behaviour he discreetly raised his wine glass as if to offer a toast. Elizabeth raised her glass but did not touch the contents.

The butler brought her beer. She drained the glass with gusto.

Then to a general horror and consternation, she deliberately drew off her white gloves, waved them in the air and handed them to the butler. The assembly was struck speechless.

The *Vorspeise* was delicious and appetizing. Eliza-

beth liked it. She ate it, as she had in Munich, with relish and without ceremony. She buttered her bread and placed a generous bit in her mouth . . . with her naked hand. The Court gasped.

She laughed with the abandon of a healthy, seventeen-year-old débutante when Prince Schwartzenberg recounted what struck her as a funny incident. She reached over and touched the hair of a near-by Princess.

"It is so lovely, so soft," she explained. "It feels like velvet, only softer."

Sophie sat aghast at the undignified performance. Some Court wit commented to his partner, "The Pearl of Possenhofen," and that was to become the name for her among her Victorian sisters, who regarded concealment as the basis of elegance and modesty.

Even Sophie, although scarcely able to wait until she could be alone with her daughter-in-law, managed to conceal her temper in public. But when she finally did get Elizabeth alone the Royal fur flew.

"Do you think you can act like a little Bavarian country urchin? Are you trying to disgrace the Emperor, the Court, the House of Hapsburg? You have shocked everybody . . . even the country will be disgusted with you. Mein Gott! Mein Gott!"

"If they cannot like me the way I am, natural, then I'm sorry."

"It is natural for an Empress to wear gloves. It is not natural for an Empress to act like a shoemaker's wife." And then Sophie launched out on a long dissertation on the way an Empress should behave in public.

Gloves were *de rigueur*; beer was no drink for an Empress in public; an Empress must control her emotions; it was beneath the dignity of an Empress to laugh aloud; fatigue, boredom or extreme pleasure should be borne alike—with a slight regal smile.

Poor old Sophie! She had faced life just that way.

She had mutely suffered so much she seemed incapable of feeling at all. And she no longer had sympathy for those who showed their feelings. Had "L'Aiglon" lived things might have been different. Her love life had died with the young King of Rome, Napoleon's only son. The romance ended tragically, Sophie was then a young matron, and L'Aiglon only twenty-one when he died. This part of her life was buried in a place as remote as her lover in the Capuchin crypt. Bitterness alone lingered, a bitterness the poisonous touch of which Elizabeth would feel often. Now she was having the pleasure of pointing out to Elizabeth the disagreeable duties incumbent upon an Empress.

"I am asking you to make no sacrifices that I have not made," she told Elizabeth. "You will never be obliged to forgo what I have for the good of the Empire. Surely it is not much to ask you to behave in accordance with the etiquette of our Court."

"I certainly refuse to dine with gloves on. Thank heaven, there's nothing the matter with my hands; that fashion must have been started by some queen with a skin disease. I'll start a brand-new fashion. No gloves! That's the last word in this Court. No gloves!"

Hot disputes between the Empress and the Archduchess became more and more frequent as time went on. The ever-turbulent resentment of an independent maid in her teens at being pushed and dominated by an officious but undoubtedly well-meaning mother-in-law imperilled the marriage at the very beginning.

Sisi laughed often—just to hold back the tears—a laughed rounded out with a sudden dazzling smile that faded almost as swiftly as it had appeared. Court balls, Court functions, bored, bored and bored her. Occasionally she managed to get away on a long walk all alone. She determined to take these walks when and where she chose. She rode alone in the woods—

especially at twilight. There she found escape, escape from the endless ceremony and ritual of the Court, the scolding Sophie, the time-clock conventions of the kindly but unexciting Emperor. She longed for the freedom of a gypsy. Oh, how right her father had been--there were liberties only denied an Empress!

Her determinations were cut short by a dreadful attack of morning sickness. The doctors were called. The Court rejoiced. Elizabeth was pregnant!

No privacy for this lovely young Empress. Her fastidious ideas and habits concerning her person meant as little to the Court as they did to Sophie. The viewpoint of the Middle Ages regarding the privacy of an Empress had been maintained.

Weary months of Sophie's nagging followed. There were more Court balls, doctors, nurses, constant attendants, priests praying the new-comer would be a boy, cardinals blessing her stomach and breasts.

Sophie ruled the palace—and, as she fondly believed, was taming the wild little Empress. Elizabeth proceeded to read the "rebel poets"—Byron, Heine, Blake. She also indulged in the writings of Dostoevski, and hid the books from the captious Sophie who considered them the works of the devil. She was not strong enough to fight for her opinions and rights—these days. When she sat with the Emperor and his statesmen, she heard the news of the day. Some of this she found rather stirring!

Huebner in Paris sent word that Napoleon III would present the Danubian principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia to Austria in exchange for the Lombardo-Venetian Kingdom. In the first place the principalities did not actually belong to Napoleon, and Franz Joseph didn't like the idea anyway. He shared a dream with

his minister, Bach, of a greater Austria extending to the shores of the Black Sea. He would take it on himself to make Moldavia and Wallachia model provinces—and they would be his. The people, good-natured, energetic, God-fearing peasants, would be his people; ready to give their lives for him.

When Napoleon woke up to what Franz Joseph and his ministers were concocting, he was furious. The French and British Ambassadors were recalled from Vienna.

On December 2, 1854, a Treaty of Alliance was drawn up by Austria, France and England.

Elizabeth listened to Bach, the aged Metternich, and other statesmen of the time. After eight months of marriage she was beginning to make head and tail out of politics, to understand European affairs. But it was still too early for her to take much interest in them. She learned that Franz Joseph had been disloyal to a man who had befriended him, the Czar of Russia, and she disliked the idea.

She read and wondered at the statement of the great Prussian statesman, Otto von Bismarck:

“The Austrians cheat at cards and are an ungrateful lot!”

On March 2, 1855, Czar Nicholas of Russia died.

“The ingratitudes of Franz Joseph killed him,” Duke Max told his Empress daughter. People at Petersburg said the same thing. The Czar had protected Franz Joseph—and loved him. He received in return ingratitude from the Austrian who entered into the triple alliance with France and England, thereby deliberately alienating Russia. Russia and Austria became bitter enemies. Neither France nor England trusted Austria. Then came the war in the Crimea.

Elizabeth was distressed for the poor widows, the fatherless children, whom she considered the victims of the greed of monarchs.

In May she was taken ill with a frightful chill followed by fever. She had splitting pains in her back. Then agonizing pains wracked her whole body. The doctors were called. The Court was informed. Her Majesty, the Empress, was in labour.

Franz Joseph, Sophie, the Cardinal, the courtiers, the ladies-in-waiting, congregated in her boudoir. For fourteen hours they kept vigil there, listening to her suffering. Meals and refreshments were served. Candles were replaced. Comfort was essential for the interested company!

At last the peak of excitement for the whispering watchers was neared. The Empress broke forth in the most piercing of wails—like an agonized animal. Professor Baldensperger felt her pulse. Still another terrible moan—crescendoing into a penetrating scream. Sophie stood by—making no attempt to hide her satisfaction with this extremely worthy performance. Smiling beatifully, she prayed—the ladies-in-waiting prayed, the whole assembly prayed—for a boy!

The Emperor paced up and down. Sometimes, he sat looking miserable, holding his head in his hands. Time lagged. Then—a tiny cry. Dr. Herrenschmidt made his appearance in the doorway—apologetically.

“It’s a—girl.”

No one present had the grace to conceal their disappointment. The Empress and her pains were forgotten by the time the guns roared forth announcing the birth of a princess. The seventeen-year-old mother was surrounded by a pandemonium of banging guns and tolling bells. Her spent body quivered long after their vibrations had ceased.

While Dr. Baldensperger tended the mother, the daughter was promptly washed, wrapped in warm flannels and baptized in a preliminary way, “Sophie” as the venerable Archduchess wished and ordered.

Elizabeth asked for her babe. It was laid beside her, a warm, red, puny, but precious mite of humanity. Its

warm body soothed hers. Her eyes filled with tears as her arm encircled the little bundle. Her after-pains became less poignant. She studied the baby carefully—and winced. It was a Wittelsbach!

Madness—genius—ultra-sensitivity—an appealing loveliness. Which would crystallize in her child? Icy waves of apprehension shot through her. So this was motherhood!

Suddenly she heard Franz Joseph's cautious footsteps—saw his figure approaching. He leaned over, kissed her brow. She heard him mechanically repeat some stock phrase of his, the meaning of which was not quite clear to her.

The drug the doctor had given her was taking effect—in a dull haze—the despised Field-Marshal's uniform—the poor inflamed membranes—gory battles of red-breeched soldiers at war—drums—cannon exploding fiery red—then quiet—quieter—the scarlet trousers were swallowed up by a blue horizon—slow time—a deep sigh, she closed her eyes and sank into a heavy slumber.

"Her Majesty, the Empress, is doing very well," the people were told.

CHAPTER V

NO MOTHER TO GUIDE THEM

Elizabeth set out for a long walk, unaccompanied —a crime against convention. Almost at once she was recognized, cheered and curtsied to. Many tried to kiss the hem of her skirt, to touch her in some way.

Again she provoked the displeasure of the Court, although she won popularity with the people as a whole. The attitude of the Court toward her at this time was that of a parent toward a very lovable, beautiful but wayward girl.

Elizabeth hated the street scenes. But she prized the courage of her convictions more. She considered it her right to go for a walk alone if she wished, and she would walk despite her shyness at being the object of a public demonstration or the charge that her conduct was unbecoming to an Empress.

"A disgrace to the Emperor," said Sophie.

"So common," sneered a superior aristocracy.

"It isn't done," admonished an easily shocked Victorian Court.

But what Elizabeth lost in prestige with the Court she gained in the hearts of the populace.

"You have much to learn, my child," scolded Sophie. "You cannot live as an ordinary human being."

"But you'll admit I am a human being!"

Sophie looked as if she were going to smack her down. The two glared at each other. To Elizabeth, Sophie was just a heckling old mother-in-law. The

young Empress determined that she would be herself despite all interference.

"I shall walk alone when I please," she said. "It does not hurt any one!"

"It hurts the Emperor," the irate Sophie exclaimed. "If you were a God-fearing woman, you would not dare to be so wilful."

"Poppie and I have decided to love God—not fear him."

"Your father is impossible!"

That was too much for Sisi. She ran from the room, quickly, breathlessly. She hated Sophie more than ever.

Following this fray with Sophie, Sisi sat disconsolate, home-sick, nerves jangling. Her ladies-in-waiting tried to distract her.

"Do you know the story of the Hapsburg ghost?" Sisi asked.

"Your Majesty would not like it."

"Why not?"

"It is too gruesome."

"Tell it to me!"

"It is a secret that the Hapsburgs have inherited for centuries. They do not like to talk of it—above a whisper."

"All the more reason I should hear it—what is this ghost?"

"It is supposed to be the shadow that hangs over the house, the shadow of eventual doom. It is a frail apparition in long white transparent robes, called the 'white lady.' It appears at night in the corridors of the palace—at times. It moans and moans, ever so softly. And if it ever reaches out to catch any one who sees it, they die, instantly!"

"Yes? Has it caught any one yet?"

"Three times it has appeared, each time, at a crisis in the Hapsburg dynasty. Once in 1621 in the early days of Ferdinand II, again in 1740 following the death

of Karl VI, and the last time in 1809 when our power was threatened by Napoleon."

"Who saw it?"

"People have seen it fly out of the window and stretch itself on the pale clouds of dawn."

The monotonous voice of the lady-in-waiting trailed on and on, as she recounted the adventures of the Hapsburgs until the tired young Empress gave orders for retirement.

Dawn had not yet broken when a shriek rang out in the bed-chamber of the Empress. A white and terror-stricken figure clutched the arms of her attendants. The "white lady" had caught her!

When this incident became known to the Emperor, he frowned. The nerves of the Empress were in a bad state. He conferred with Minister Bach. A visit to Bohemia was recommended. It would be diverting, too, for the young sovereign, and perhaps useful to the Empire.

Elizabeth was eager for the change. She took the spontaneous delight of a child with a new toy in preparing for the journey, their first official trip together.

She loved it all—the landscapes, the rugged beauty of the Carpathians—the singing, smiling peasants, looking like funny dolls in their native toggery as they greeted and saluted them.

Even the Czechs outdid themselves in Prague, showing honour to the Royal pair. Elizabeth bowed and bowed and waved her slender little hand as she returned their smiles. The new Empress captivated the hearts of the people wherever she appeared.

Elizabeth knew nothing about the political ambitions of the Czechs—and nothing was done to enlighten her. The journey of the Royal pair was like a parade. If there were suppressed resentment, or brewing dissatisfaction, it was lost on them both. Franz Joseph knew but little more. The information he received from his councillors, from Minister Bach, was always in favour

of the Crown. The Emperor was not in touch with the people. His ears were carefully guarded against the receipt of "rumours" that might be disturbing.

Elizabeth, as a result of the voyage, felt stronger, more fitted and resigned to take up her duties as an Empress.

August 18, 1855, Franz Joseph's twenty-fifth birthday, was celebrated throughout the kingdom. On that day, the Emperor signed the Concordat—a triumph for Sophie, Cardinal Rauscher, Metternich, Bach and the Catholic party.

By this act, the Emperor renounced all rights of interference in ecclesiastical affairs of the Empire. Canon law became the law of the realm. The status of marriage, morals, education, even censorship of books, were delegated to the Church.

Surrounding Franz Joseph were some of the most able men of the time—Metternich, Bach, Keubbeck, Kempen, Hess and Buol.

In this political chess game the Knights used the King as if he were a pawn. They moved him this way and that, according to their respective interests, but always in such a way as to make the Emperor believe he actually initiated the policies he merely affirmed. They knew the Emperor well. His vanity, his inbred belief in Divine Right of Kings, his love of tradition, precedence and convention, his almost hysterical fear of radical tendencies in the people—all tended to make him not difficult to lead.

Sophie's guiding hand wore an invisible iron glove. From his birth until the time of his betrothal he had not escaped her domination, and only in the selection of Sisi had he discovered the joy of independence—which was to distress his mother very much and make her all the more resentful toward Elizabeth. But the Emperor's new-found freedom was short-lived.

In the signing of the Concordat, Sophie realized one of her greatest hopes. But she had more to be thankful for on this happy day. For the first time since Franz Joseph's marriage he lined up with her aganist Elizabeth. He agreed with his mother—Elizabeth was a "difficult person." Even against the stern advice of his mother Franz Joseph had been able to forgive the Empress for her youthful peccadilloes—her persistence in walking on the streets alone, her dislike of gloves at formal dinners, and her originality in regard to conventions. But there was a new development that could not be ignored. . . . Elizabeth refused to go to Mass unless she felt like it, and she refused to go to confession or Holy Communion at all! Franz Joseph promised Sophie he would "take action." But it was not so easy when he remonstrated with Elizabeth. She quietly but firmly informed him:

"I shall do as I please, Franz."

"But, Sisi, that is childish talk. You are not a private individual—neither you nor I can do as we please." Then very gently, "Sisi, I ask as a favour—for my birthday—"

"You shall have what you wish for your birthday—Franz!"

Elizabeth promised to go to confession, Holy Communion, and attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days. The promise made, the Royal pair attended the big reception in the Emperor's honour in the Hofburg, an unusually brilliant affair.

After a toast had been drunk to the Emperor, Prince Metternich made a courtly bow to the Empress. Metternich, still hale and hearty, still the meticulous dandy, his sparse hair curled in ringlets, his slender waist still held tightly in corsets, his rich velvet coat glittering with decorations, he was, as always, gallant, and this day he was enthusiastic.

"Your Majesty," he said, "I have known Napoleon—I arranged his marriage with Marie Louise.

I was present at the birth of his son, the Duke of Reichstadt (L'Aiglon)—I was also present at his funeral. I have played a part in many historic events. But to-day, with the signing of the Concordat, I have experienced the greatest and happiest moment of my life! May I drink to its great success with the loveliest lady we have ever had at this Court in my time!"

"And I drink to one of the greatest and most gallant of statesmen!"

At midnight the festivities came to an end. It was indeed late for an Emperor who got up at four o'clock every morning to be at his desk an hour later!

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Baby Sophie was an exquisitely pretty baby with fuzzy golden curls, long lashes, a rosebud mouth and a healthy dimpled body. Elizabeth begged her mother-in-law to allow her to nurse the infant—although this was not at all permitted by Spanish etiquette, to an Empress!

"Whoever heard of such a thing!" Sophie spluttered. "Really, Elizabeth, you act more like a tailor's wife than the wife of a great Emperor!"

"I wish to God I were the wife of a tailor—and happy!"

Sophie crossed herself in the presence of such sacrilege!

Elizabeth's effort toward establishing her authority this time was cut short. In came the baby's nurse, accompanied by the wet-nurse and the lady-in-waiting! A scene was not the thing in front of the wet-nurse! Her milk might be affected. The five women talked trivialities.

At last the smarting young mother was left alone. Putting on a pair of comfortable old shoes and a loose dress, she started for a walk down the Kartnerstrasse, quickening her pace as people bowed to her. She went into a shop, bought perfume, carried it out in a neat

package, as she had done in Munich. Then she bought stockings, a cap for little Sophie, and a smokable-looking pipe for Duke Max.

She looked so like any pretty young girl in her plain clothes that few people recognized her. She re-entered the Palace with her packages—which she refused to hand over to any of the army of flunkeys. In her own apartments she had the pleasure of undoing her bundles; then to try the perfume . . . a dab here, a dab there, as any girl of her age might do, with eyes and cheeks glowing, heart racing a bit with simple pleasure. She carried the dainty cap to the baby's apartments. She had to be quiet—the baby was asleep. She leaned over the lace-covered crib, so fragrant, so sweet—her baby!

Carefully, tenderly, she put an arm under the warm little body—a hand under the tiny round buttocks—and lifted the child against her breast.

Carefully, she sat down without awakening the tot. She sat looking—looking down with a sad, sweet smile.

“So—so—so,” she crooned. “Don’t leave this room!” she ordered the nurse, in a whisper.

The nurse sat down, nervously. She feared the old Archduchess Sophie, who would have been shocked at this performance. Should she run and inform the Archduchess that Her Majesty had her baby in her arms?

Then Sophie made her appearance.

“What’s the meaning of all this?” she demanded furiously. “What have I told you?”

“Please mind your own affairs,” answered Elizabeth, quietly.

Little Sophie awakened—looked puzzled—started blubbering, squalled. The apartment was in an uproar. Sophie II, Sophie I, Elizabeth, the nurse, the wet-nurse, two ladies-in-waiting were all upset because an Empress had come unbidden into her baby’s nursery, had taken the Royal babe out of the crib, and held it in

her arms; in other words had acted like a common, ordinary mother!

The Court took Sophie's side.

"What can one expect from the 'Pearl of Possenhofen'?"

In those days, the Court and aristocracy looked down on the toiler. Tradesmen were not acceptable to society. A doctor of medicine had no social status beyond that of a horse doctor. Much to the consternation of Ludoveca, Elizabeth's brother, Frederich, was becoming a famous doctor in Bavaria. And Elizabeth was delighted.

She understood, and had a bond of affection for the common people that was little less than *lèse-majesté*. A despiser of artificiality and snobbery, her contempt for Court life became almost a complex, a contempt which was by no means one-sided. It was rather through intuition than knowledge that she had partly humanized the attitude of Franz Joseph towards subjects suspected of revolutionary activities. And it was because of her contributions in this direction, that the name of Empress Elizabeth is to-day inscribed in history among the leaders in liberal government. It is a notable accomplishment for good made by one woman because of her power over one man.

Her second political triumph was to occur in Italy. At this time the most vulnerable points of Hapsburg power were centred in Venice and Lombardo. Lombardo consisted of the former dukedoms of Milan and Mantua—Austrian possessions since the Spanish War of Succession. Venice was first ceded to the Hapsburgs after the peace of Campo Formio and again recognized after Napoleon's downfall. An entirely Italian city, it considered itself under foreign domina-

tion. For nine years it had been the scene of numerous outbreaks and as numerous repressions. Something had to be done.

One day early in November 1855, Franz Joseph came into Elizabeth's boudoir to ask if she would like to go on a trip to Italy.

"Wonderful! When? At once! Can't we go at once?"

"Yes, dear. And we shall be gone several months."

"Oh—several months? But my baby—" Tears came to her eyes. "But I'm not allowed to nurse my baby, not allowed to see her very often—and—she's the only one I care about here. Yes, it is better to be away—let's go at once! Oh, Franz, I've always wanted to go to Italy."

For five months Elizabeth would enjoy freedom from the Archduchess Sophie. Their friends hoped it would be the means of drawing the Royal pair closer together. They left on November 17, 1856.

Franz Joseph said it would be a second honeymoon. And once away from Sophie's influence, he became gentleness itself to Elizabeth. Life was once more full of interest.

On the train, Elizabeth recited part of Byron's "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage."

"...heaven is free,
From clouds, but of all colours seems to be
Melted in one vast Iris of the West
Where the day joins the past eternity ;
While on the other hand, meek Diana's crest
Floats through the azure air—an Island of the Blest."

Franz Joseph yawned.

"Don't you think that's beautiful, Franz?"

"Hmph! I don't like rebels like Byron!"

Elizabeth smiled to herself. She would not annoy him with more poetry.

She was shocked at the state of affairs in Italy. The very first time she went to the theatre she had witnessed a puffed little bully of a Bohemian, a Prefect of Police, demanding at the point of his pistol that all the Italian aristocracy, occupying the boxes stand at attention while the Austrian national anthem was played. The bully was proud of himself, certain that he had pleased the young sovereigns. So were the Croat service men stationed at either side of the stage with their rifles.

The Empress had heard that the Croat guard behaved themselves like pigs. Now, she could see how they acted! To show their contempt for all things Italian they spat repeatedly and noisily blew their noses on the stage platform! Later she learned that some of the oldest and greatest Italian families had had their fortunes confiscated.

Franz Joseph was considered responsible for the brutality, the stupidity and the injustice of Austrian rule in Lombardo-Venetia. It was a dubious compliment. Radetzky was the real ruler of the land. Behind him was Sophie, still the "man" at the Imperial Palace. Siding with her were a row of Austrian statesmen. Franz Joseph, the figurehead, busied himself with the signing of death-warrants, orders for torture, confiscation of property, without realizing their real import. He had the signing of his name down to a fine art! Small wonder he had to rise at four a.m. Small wonder he was hated.

One night, when the sovereigns attended a performance at the Fenice Theatre in Venice, a young Italian nobleman, struck by Elizabeth's beauty, succeeded in being presented to her. Pretending to speak in a casual way about the play, he disclosed a plot against her life.

"Your Majesty will be wise to be careful. There is a plot brewing that places your life in extreme danger. It is planned to seize you and the Emperor following the performance. Conspirators have got possession of the San Secondo Fort near the city. They plan to

take you there and offer His Majesty the choice between surrendering Lombardo and Venice or being blown to bits in the fort."

The Royal party left the theatre under a heavy guard of police. The conspirators' plans were frustrated. Alone in their apartments Elizabeth conversed with the Emperor far into the night.

"Franz, there is a dire situation here. In God's name, you must do something about it!"

"Why, my dear child, what do you know about it? There is very, very little we can do—under the circumstances."

"I do know that you are ruling these people like a beast!" She burst into tears. "I have heard that the people are flogged—tortured—beaten; that they often confess to crimes of which they are innocent. It's a horrible blot on your name that will go down through the centuries—"

Franz resorted to caresses to comfort her. The Empress persisted.

"Franz, show mercy!"

As the Emperor paced the floor she went to him. Her arms were about him. She brought him down to his knees.

"Darling, for my sake—for the sake of our baby—and I mean for the sake of the—one we shall have soon! Won't you do what I ask—to please me?"

Next morning she learned she had won the day. Franz Joseph became merciful. The city of Brescia was relieved from the obligation of paying the outstanding instalment on a forced loan. Political prisoners of Padua, Rovigo and Vicenza were set free. Refugees from the states of the Church, convicted of high treason and cast in prison, were liberated. The Emperor, in the name of Elizabeth, gave large sums of money to the poor.

She was worshipped in Venice by the emotional,

demonstrative Italians—this eighteen-year-old Empress!

“The face of a Madonna—the heart of an angel!” raved the Venetians. “Made of noble Carrara marble! She takes the curse off the Hapsburgs!”

The Royal couple spent the Christmas holidays in Venice—far away from Sophie. Franz Joseph and Elizabeth were nearer to each other than was generally thought possible. The Emperor gave magnificent fêtes which delighted the pleasure-loving Venetians. Elizabeth fell in love with the people.

January 15, 1856, saw their arrival in Milan. Elizabeth's fame as an angel of mercy had already reached the city. The welcome was enthusiastic. Franz Joseph was elated at “his success.”

He sent for his ministers, Bach, Bruck, Buol and Gruenne—for a number of his military officers of the Empire, now in Vienna.

Intrigue followed closely on the heels of their arrival. Count Gruenne was Sophie's favourite spy. He wasted no time in informing the Hofburg that Elizabeth was influencing the Emperor. He was making too many concessions.

Gruenne was hated by the Army and despised by the people. The Austrians themselves called the combination of Archduchess Sophie and Count Gruenne the “fiendish invisible Government.”

Upon receiving these reports from Gruenne, Sophie's fury was intense, but she was helpless.

The ministers finally managed temporarily to check Franz Joseph. The people of Milan were quick to resent it—and to show their resentment. They continued to “adore Elizabeth,” but anti-Austrian sentiment increased as the days went by. Half-mourning and black-gloves were worn by many of the nobility at the theatre.

The Emperor sent to Vienna for Gobelin tapestries, linen, gold plate—fittings for the festal board. He would dazzle the people with his magnificence. But it was hardly what the people wanted.

At the first Court ball, the Emperor discovered that no Italian woman would dance with an Austrian officer. Then Franz Joseph "acted." He announced a general amnesty.

The Milan correspondent of the Augsburg *Allgemeiner Zeitung* wrote:

"The enthusiasm here is boundless. Hundreds of families wept for joy. The opposition is now confined to a few people of the middle class, and women who have not been invited to Court. The Milanese do not yet love the Empire, but they love the Imperial pair. Every one is conscious of the kindly hand of that noble lady who has so changed the Emperor."

When the Royal pair returned to Vienna the old regime in Lombardo and Venice was a thing of the past. Confiscated properties had been restored; deserters from the Army had been allowed to return to their homes. In place of the drastic Field-Marshal Radetzky, Franz Joseph appointed his twenty-four-year-old brother, Archduke Ferdinand Maximilian, as governor (due largely to Elizabeth's efforts). It can be said that Elizabeth, in tempering the rule of Franz Joseph, had already done not only a good service to the people, but an invaluable one to the Empire.

CHAPTER VI

BROOD MARE

Once more the dark grey walls of the Hofburg closed in on Elizabeth—with a trouble-making mother-in-law back of the scenes. Sophie nagged—nagged—nagged. Elizabeth escaped to her dream land. Already several months gone in her second pregnancy she no longer could walk nor ride about alone.

She read a great deal. Her favourite authors were Sautier, Dumas, George Sand, De Musset, Beranger, Byron and Heine. She especially liked Heine. Here was a poet with a heart like her own, who found freedom in nature through woods, fields and mountains. One of Heine's poems that so perfectly expressed Elizabeth's own thoughts, it might have been made to order, was :

He's a king, this happy herd boy,
And his throne's the grassy down,
And the sun above his forehead
Is his great and golden crown.

At his feet the sheep are lying,
Flattering courtiers, soft and sly ;
And his cavaliers are cattle,
Stamping arrogantly by.

Like a minister, his watch dog,
Governs with an open ear,
And his loud suspicious barking
Makes the very echoes fear.

Sleepily the young king mutters :
“ Ah, to rule is hard and mean ;
How I wish that I were home now
With my cosy little queen ! ”

Even Elizabeth's taste in poetry smattered of treason. What a shock it would later be to Franz Joseph when he learned that the Empress of the Holy Roman Empire read and liked the work of a "little Jewish rebel"!

Heine, so lucid and so simple in his language, so lyrical in his rhythms, so brave and fearless his spirit in that fragile body, persecuted because he was a Jew, and dying in a miserable garret in Paris, was creator of a world of beauty and hope for a young Empress, an Empress just beginning life—beginning to bring forth another life!

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Sophie and the whole Empire prayed once more for a boy. On a sultry warm night in June 1856, after long hours of agony, Elizabeth gave birth to—another girl, Gazela.

Opiates spared the Empress the torture of seeing the disappointment she caused the Emperor—of the long faces of the countless Court officials.

The inevitable hour of awakening brought the predatory Sophie. Her tongue was well oiled.

"Naturally, Elizabeth, we wanted a boy."

Sophie sighed, picked up the small bundle and smiled or, as Elizabeth confided to her sister, "sneered." Holding the baby, the dowager looked self-righteous and hurt.

"Ah—if it had only been a boy, we would have called him 'Rudolf,' after the founder of the thousand-year-old dynasty of the Hawks, who deserted the forests of Switzerland to fly above the lovely land of Austria!"

"I'm awfully tired. Do you mind if I sleep a little now?" Elizabeth countered feebly.

Sophie sighed once more. Laying the bundle gingerly in the nurse's arms she haughtily left the room.

Sophie was again in full charge of the nursery. The

Emperor upheld her in this right. The Court backed her up. The whole Empire seemed to stand beside her—and in front of Elizabeth like a stone wall. Elizabeth longed to see more of her babies. This was denied her.

Little Sophie was two, Gazela one year old, when in May 1857 the Imperial pair left for a visit to Hungary, the land of the Magyars, a sore spot for the House of Hapsburg. Their mission was one of reconciliation. Elizabeth, understanding the feeling of the Hungarians, requested Franz Joseph to wear the uniform of a Hungarian cavalry general. This would have pleased the chauvinistic people immensely.

Franz Joseph had other ideas. He wore the uniform of an Austrian Field-Marshal, with the inevitable tight-fitting red trousers, despised by Elizabeth—and to the Hungarians a reminder that their ruler was a foreigner.

The crowds were unruly. They refused to wave the black and yellow flags of the Hapsburgs. Instead they waved the Hungarian *tricolour*. Again the prison doors opened to receive rebels against the Crown. Only the merchants with an eye for profits fawned on the Royal pair.

The Hungarian nobility quietly refused to take any part in the festivities. The Emperor's Grand Ball in the Deutsches Theatre fell flat. Business men and the civic officials were the only guests. But the Hungarian nobles held out a plan of compromise to the Hapsburger.

At the National Theatre, the festival opera *Erzsebet* was produced in honour of the Royal visitors. Here the Hungarians wore their most beautiful costumes and jewels. It was a brilliant gathering. But the Hungarians showed that they were Hungarians. The *tricolour*—not the Hapsburg flag—was displayed.

Elizabeth understood this feeling of national pride.

She told Franz Joseph that they were patriots in the true sense of the word.

"They fight as they love, from their hearts," she said. "If you could win their loyalty—and support—what a victory it would be."

Elizabeth's liberalizing influence on Franz Joseph's "absolutism" was already known to the Hungarians. But there were more reasons for her immediate popularity in Budapest. Franz Joseph had accepted everything as his right. Elizabeth went out of her way to be gracious, to thank the nobles for their chivalry. She won their esteem, and she, in turn, became very fond of the Hungarians as individuals and as a race.

The visit was broken by tragic news. Baby Sophie was dead.

During all the long journey by carriage to Laxenburg near Vienna, Elizabeth swayed back and forth in silent grief. Stricken deeper than in all her young life, she swayed as if to the strain of some mute lullaby for her first-born—first-born who had never known a mother's love, though a mother had longed to give it. Possibly, she sobbed out her resentment toward the Archduchess Sophie's interference until the pain in her heart would start her miserably swaying once more to the rhythm of unhappiness, heart throbs beating time through the hours that were her scale of misery. This, her first real tragedy, developed in her a habitually nervous motion, a rocking from side to side, which was to distinguish her at all times at tragic moments.

Through desolate, primitive, weary country, they rode two long days. Through pools of stagnant water the horses splashed. Would they ever arrive? The uninhabited plains seemed endless. Here and there was a gypsy encampment. That was all—sordid squalor bounded by sordid horizons.

Elizabeth's first sight of her dead child was the signal for Sophie to succumb to an attack of nerves.

"God cursed your marriage!" she cried at the unhappy pair. "You, Franz, you would marry against your mother's wishes—and you, Elizabeth, you would neglect your church duties!"

She vented her spleen on Elizabeth, who, according to Sophie, had angered the Lord by her impiety and her disregard of her duties as an Empress. She even remembered Elizabeth's impious taste in literature—Byron and Heine! She was indeed all that the wife of Franz Joseph should not have been—exactly as the worthy Sophie had prophesied at their first meeting—and God had taken her first-born as punishment!

While Franz Joseph accepted the sympathy of the many distinguished mourners, the Empress remained mute. She received no one. At the funeral she appeared heavily veiled and disappeared to remain in her rooms at the Hofburg immediately afterward.

The eager expression that had once so brightened her lovely dark eyes gave place to a hurt look. She sought solitude. The approach of any one, except a few most intimate friends, caused her to quicken her pace—in another direction. Here also began the quick nervous walk so characteristic in her later life.

Elizabeth found escape in nature and riding. Her love of horses surged to the surface. The smell of stables, saddles, groom-lore, these became her tonic—her opiate. They offered escape into another world.

The renowned Spanish stables of the Hofburg became Elizabeth's favourite haunt. Here the fine Arabian horses were put through their paces by expert riders. Here the technique of the Moorish riding masters of Cordoba was demonstrated. Elizabeth was a match for any of them. She would tackle a savage stallion with all the skill of a professional. From childhood she had possessed a curious *rappor*t with horses.

She visited the stables every morning, fed her

favourites, spent hours talking horse-flesh with the grooms. After all, she was not yet twenty and a dream of childhood returned—to be a circus queen! She took lessons from a well-known circus rider. In short black satin tights she learned to stand on the backs of prancing horses, balancing, trick-stepping, dancing, whirling. She behaved like some bareback artist under the big tops, instead of an Empress, and gloried in it. Duke Max encouraged her.

"Lead your own life, Sisi, you're not harming any one and the exercise is a wonderful thing for your nerves."

She needed encouragement. Not only did she have countless scenes with Sophie, but even Franz Joseph strenuously objected.

A year passed. The Empress showed no signs of pregnancy. Sophie pursed her lips. Cardinal "R" must be consulted. They connived. One must remember, Sophie reminded, what the great Napoleon had done in a case like this. Why shouldn't Franz Joseph do the same?

"She breeds only girls—when she does at all," Sophie complained. "Let us take the example Napoleon set for us—he set Josephine aside, as was his duty, since she could give him no heir."

The Cardinal never argued with his patroness.

"It is a most unfortunate marriage," he agreed.

"I was certain you would agree with me," Sophie smiled.

"But let us wait a while, Your Highness," the Cardinal advised. "It will all come out for the best—in God's good time."

Elizabeth, unaware of this conference, entered her private apartments, flushed and cheered from a glorious jaunt in the park. She was surprised to see on her writing-table a human skull! There was a note

underneath, which she pulled from its gruesome paper-weight. Certain paragraphs were underlined in red pencil.

She read—furtively:

“ . . . The natural destiny of a Queen is to give an heir to the throne ; the King who says to his wife, ‘ Madame, we look to you to give us sons and not advice,’ thus puts the ambitious creature in her place, and has taught a lesson to all Queens in the world.

“ The destiny and the natural calling of a Queen is thus to provide heirs to the Crown. So soon as they desert this duty, they become the source of all manner of evil.

“ If the Queen is so fortunate as to provide the state with a Crown Prince this should be the end of her ambition.

“ She should by no means meddle with the government of an Empire, the care of which is not the task for a woman. The Salic law excludes her for ever in the foolishness of her sex from the exercise of sovereignty.

“ If the Queen bears no sons, she is merely a foreigner in the state, a very dangerous foreigner.

“ As she can never hope to be looked on kindly and must always expect to be sent back whence she came, she will always seek to win the King by other than natural means. She will struggle for a position and power by intrigue and the sowing of discord, to the mischief of the King, the nation, the Empire. . . .”

It was from an old pamphlet directed against Marie Antoinette. Elizabeth immediately recognized the hand of Sophie.

“ An Empress,” she thought bitterly, “ is nothing but a brood mare.”

The Emperor made up his mind to make a visit to Napoleon III. Elizabeth was to accompany him.

The French Empress Eugenie was at the height of her fame and power. Thirty-two years old, beautiful, brilliant, she was a force to be reckoned with. Every chancellory in Europe kept eyes turned toward the third Napoleon.

Eugenie found Elizabeth "very charming and beautiful." The two Empresses became friends. They discussed children, clothes, manners—feminine high spots.

Franz Joseph discussed politics with Napoleon III. In referring to the recent trip of the Royal Austrian pair to Italy, Franz Joseph said:

"Victor Emanuel often forgets to behave like a gentleman. It is not that he lacks natural nobility, but he is slovenly in his attitude—as he is in his clothes and bearing."

The Austrian gesture was hardly a diplomatic one. Italy was at least a geographic neighbour. In fact this visit was not what might be considered as a political coup—but it did establish a close personal friendship between the wives of the two Emperors, and in these times such friendships were of as much importance in diplomacy as parallel political interests.

Not long after the return to Vienna, Elizabeth discovered that she was pregnant. On the day she realized her condition, a rainbow appeared in the sky. This Elizabeth considered a good omen ; and so she felt certain that this child would be a boy.

That colossal, symmetric elegance that is Schoenbrunn Palace, which delighted and impressed the Austrian Court, seemed like a prison to Elizabeth.

She preferred the natural simplicity of Laxenburg. To Laxenburg she went for her confinement. She had

been married four years. This was to be her third child.

Tired in body and soul, resentful toward the conventions of the Court, shocked by a system of government that denied the masses the privileges and rights of the rich—the blood of liberalism flowed in the veins of the unborn babe. Rebellion against authority, pity for the people, the workers, the artists, seemed to be a strong pre-natal influence. Such sentiment would play a great part in the life of this child lying beneath her heart.

Franz Joseph was once more entirely under Sophie's thumb. Among other things, she arranged delectable female company at the castle! Elizabeth's sickness afforded the opportunity for—and in Franz Joseph's opinion, justified him in seeking—other female companionship. Sisi—the little brood mare—seemed in her place at last.

Adorned in his Field-Marshal's uniform, scarlet trousers and all, the Emperor presented himself at Laxenburg. He and an Empire were once more hoping for the birth of a boy and heir. The rambling old yellow palace, with its green shutters, on this scorching August day in 1858, was the setting for a breathless scene.

A group of watchful attendants clustered about; old Dr. Baldensperger in his frock coat and a row of decorations on his chest; the young assistant in white; nurses in stiff white uniforms.

Lying on the bed—where all the spectators might view her, was the twenty-year-old Empress, face taut and pale with suffering. Her long dark hair hung in two heavy plaits. Occasional spasms of pain distorted the exquisite features. The body trembled beneath the silken covers.

His Imperial and Royal Highness, the Archduke

Rainer, an old man now, perspiring in his elaborate uniform, had been there, awaiting the event since morning. He was the Prime Minister. From time to time—adjusting his monocle diffidently, he studied the Empress through the half-open door. For several hours she had been in labour. He found it most fatiguing. He informed Sophie that if Her Majesty continued to delay the event, *he* would have to have a nap! So Sophie prepared a bed for him, on a sofa in the corner! They could take no chances on his not being present at the birth.

Nor was he the only one of importance who had been waiting impatiently for hours. Privy Councillors, Charles Ferdinand, Buel, Schauenstein, and a brilliant array of men and women in splendid uniforms and gorgeous dresses, milled about outside. Occasionally some detoured through the lovely gardens.

Dr. Baldensperger finally announced the arrival of a son and heir. The announcement was greeted by an up-roar of excitement—congratulations—fervent thanks to God. Cannons boomed. The whole Empire celebrated.

The young heir's mother lay numb with pain. Even the Court was silent, though her imagination called up dismal noises that clashed and clashed. Contracted and worn, she lay listening for the inevitable footsteps. One pair would be Sophie's, the ever-meddlesome Sophie who would come in to ogle her with microscopic eye, after which she would inquire—gloatingly—about her after-pains. One pair would be the Emperor's—his, the precise, measured tread—that possessive, assured footstep. He would be wearing the uniform she loathed, those leg-hugging scarlet trousers. They were Franz Joseph's pride, his passion, his conceit and—all important—his privilege! To Elizabeth they were a symbol.

The Emperor appeared abruptly as if some magic box had opened at the touch of her thoughts. He had brought the Order of the Golden Fleece for his son.

"Her Majesty's eyes looked like the pictures one sees of Jeanne d'Arc—as if they, too, saw visions!" wrote the nurse in attendance in her diary. "In a weird sort of voice she exclaimed, 'Some day, there will be myriad red flags flying from the windows of Vienna—flags the colour of those red trousers—remember what I say—that day will come!'"

Her Majesty was raving, the nurse explained to the Emperor, as she bathed the feverish brow with cool water. But Elizabeth opened her eyes and said quietly:

"I spoke the truth."

"Now, Sisi—you will be better in a few days. We have a splendid boy. I am exceedingly happy." Kneeling beside her, Franz Joseph kissed her hand. "What a fortunate fellow he will be—our little Crown Prince!"

"I only hope so, Franz—I only hope so——"

At a sign from the doctor, Franz Joseph left the room. The sleeping potion was administered. Elizabeth closed her eyes. The prophecy of the red flags was forgotten.

Court etiquette stepped in once more to add a thorn to motherhood. An Empress must not bring up her own son. An "Aja" must be obtained. "Aja" is a Portuguese word meaning "Auntie"—a kind of Royal nurse *de luxe*, who would take charge of his Imperial Highness, the Crown Prince, from the day of his birth until his sixth year. The entire apartment of the baby heir to the throne would be under her direction. She would be the general-in-chief of a small army of nurses, sub-nurses, maids, flunkeys, wet-

nurses and all the other personal servants that make life "royal" for a baby.

Sophie chose for this purpose Baroness Welden. That was that!

"Your duty is to conceive and bear sons," Sophie repeated to Elizabeth. "I shall direct their education."

As usual, the Empress was forbidden any authority in the life of her own child.

Once more days of hovering—of clandestine visits to the nursery—for the joy of bending over the little crib where lay her baby son. Then footsteps—dreaded footsteps. Elizabeth seemed almost to flutter in her nervousness!

These were the days of hide-and-seek—of fluttering, hovering—darting away, like some lovely white bird—pink-footed, soft-breasted—trying to perch on the mast-head of a galleon, pitching in a stormy sea—in the darkness.

Duke Max wrote Elizabeth begging her to come to him for a visit. "We will ride again over the mountain paths—now neglected by you—and we shall talk about life, and everything that interests us."

Sisi hurried to him. She spent two weeks at her old home. Sisi told Max all her troubles.

"Poppie, they just won't let me have my babies in my arms. There's a million servants around and they all tell Sophie. Sometimes I become so depressed I don't know what to do with myself!"

Max advised independence. "Stay away from the place as much as possible, Sisi; they never could understand you, Liebling, and they never will. You'll only kill yourself if you try to please them—the hypocrites!"

Max handed her a glass of beer. Sisi smiled as she drank.

"Can you imagine them trying to deprive me of even this, in Vienna?"

"What! Deprive you of beer?"

"Yes, Poppie, once just as I was about to enjoy a big long draught—when I was thirsty!"

"Well, I'll be——"

"Yes, old Sophie just came in and took my glass away. She told the servants they must bring me wine—beer is too common—according to them."

"I told you once, darling, they would try that kind of thing on you—but I always thought you had enough spirit to stick up for your rights."

"But Sophie actually tried to force me to give it up!"

"I hope you pulled the tablecloth off with everything on it, Sisi. The nerve of that old hen—taking away my little girl's beer—just as you were about to drink it too."

"But I insisted on having it," Elizabeth put in.

"Don't worry, I wouldn't let them forget I am a Bavarian. I said I drank beer with my father when I was a child and no one could take it away from me now."

"And you can have beer?"

"Absolutely."

"Bravo!"

Refreshed and invigorated by her Possenhofen vacation, Elizabeth returned to Vienna. She was greeted by rumours of the infidelity of Franz Joseph. She said nothing. In fact she was pleased. It was whispered about that Elizabeth had a physical aversion to Franz Joseph. She made no effort to deny it.

She escaped to a dream world at every unpleasant crisis. She lived in a world of fantasy. There she was

a free and a private citizen. Safe in the harbour of imagination she looked out at the Court which curtsied, kissed the hem of her skirt and—whispered ugly things about her.

“The Pearl of Possenhofen,” she was called. To the Court she was an awkward country girl who did not know how to wear clothes.

Elizabeth resolved to be free. She had done her duty to the Crown, had brought an heir into the world. She no longer owed either her body or soul to the Emperor. His infidelities relieved her of responsibility from the former, and as Duke Max had often told her, freedom of soul was a gift from God, the All Mighty.

She gloried in the thought of walking bravely forth to forbidden people and places—to forbidden houses—as she had with her jolly father when she was in her first pigtails. She sought the same joy of living she had once known when setting out to visit her illegitimate brothers and sisters. How those loved ones had petted and hugged her—reciprocated her love! How free her wild little heart had been then.

It was the winter of 1860. The Empress had been married six years. A crisis in her life was at hand. She told the Emperor. He was in his study, a vast, depressing room. Its stiff chairs and uncomfortable-looking stools appeared to Elizabeth like torture-chamber racks, awaiting their victims. Two huge windows gaped with their heavy, ugly curtains. This bleak background suited the stiff, formal figure in uniform that rose to greet her.

She sank into the chair he brought for her. As he took his place at the desk she began in a low, strained voice:

“Franz, I’ve come on a matter of great importance. I beg of you to hear me through. And I beg of you to understand that what I have decided is—final. After

the first night of our marriage I realized—was convinced, I could never—love you—never be to you what I should be. I'm sorry, Franz, believe me. I've tried to do my duty—and I know my greatest duty was to give you an heir. I've done that. Now I'm going away—to Madeira—for a rest—change—whatever you wish to call it! ”

Her breath was coming fast. Her cheeks were flushed. A bright light was in her eyes. Franz Joseph retreated behind a cold mask. Elizabeth continued:

“ I know your opinion on divorce, annulment—and I'll not annoy you by going into that with you. I care nothing for what the world says. But I wish you would divorce me—take someone else for your wife—someone who would be your mate—mentally, physically—as I am not nor ever can be——”

Elizabeth broke off abruptly. The Emperor was ashen pale. Between clenched teeth he answered her.

“ Divorce! Never! Go—go away for a while. I'll announce that you have gone for a change of—air. And I pray, with God's help, you will come back soon.”

Elizabeth sat rigid. Her answer was controlled, emotionless.

“ To the Hofburg—to the children, Franz, but I can never—never again come to live with you as your wife.”

There were tears in the Emperor's steel-blue eyes. His mouth twitched. He said nothing for several moments—an age of tense, miserable moments.

“ I beg of you to remember that your behaviour is a matter that concerns the highest interests of the State.”

“ Then,” she challenged, “ see that I am well protected! I consider myself free to do as I please! ”

“ That goes without saying,” he replied. “ I will protect you.”

A stock phrase of his, " That goes without saying " —how she had grown to hate it !

" Despite all my efforts I feel I am useless to my children. Your mother takes it upon herself to run them as she has tried to run me since my arrival."

" She feels—strongly the importance of the Hapsburgs—do you find that strange ? She knows that our children represent a time-proven dynasty—and she thinks you are too much of a child yourself, Sisi, to be entrusted with the upbringing of as important a personage as the Crown Prince."

" I am simply the brood mare ! That's all—I know, Franz, your mother even informed me of that, and I inform you now, that I will breed no more——" hands clenched she made a despairing gesture, " I have come to tell you that—just that, Franz——"

The Emperor stood transfixed—mind a blank. Words failed him. Etiquette failed him. The phrases he could muster seemed beneath his dignity—the dignity of his Apostolic Majesty in this room so fraught with historic significance.

From without rang the silvery notes of bugles announcing the relief of the guard. The tension was momentarily broken. Since the beginning of his reign the change of guard had been a regular part of his day, to watch the battalions parade by in the courtyard below. Regardless of what task he had in hand he always went to the window. His soldier's heart thrilled at the sight of his splendidly uniformed men training for the defence of his Empire. That day, though unbidden tears were in his eyes and the thought that the interview was not yet terminated perturbed his mind—he could not refuse the bugles' summons. He went to the window. The Empress joined him. Together their two heavy hearts beat faster to the buoyant strains of the martial music.

With keen eyes the Emperor watched the gratifying spectacle of the riflemen from the Tyrol as they gal-

lantly swung by. The Empress stood erectly, as was expected of her, while the men saluted. But her eyes looked beyond the horizon—her ears caught new music of the spheres—Wagnerian music—crescendoing.

They continued to stand—a picture of two handsome young sovereigns—while the tall soldiers from Meran and Innsbruck marched along in perfect step.

She took the Emperor's arm as the parade was over and led him back to the desk where she sat.

"I want to talk to you of the Crown Prince. I know you wish above all that he will be a good soldier. You can make him that—far better than I can. I—I love him so much, I might make him soft. He seems such a sweet baby—" she checked an outburst of sentiment.

"Franz," she continued, "I shall see him and his sister when I return—shall stay with them—and then again, I shall disappear. Remember, I love my little boy—and I pity him!"

Ghastly scandal! Her decision meant that to the Emperor. But Elizabeth's will was irrevocable.

"The nurse will keep me informed of the children's health," Elizabeth essayed gently. "And I hope you will forgive me—not stand in my way."

"I shall act for the best," he said, repeating his stock phrase. He bent to kiss her cold little hand.

Elizabeth left him quickly—almost ran to her apartments. The sight of the packing thrilled her, calmed her fears. She would escape; the prison bars were broken. She felt a small sort of hysterical affection for the man she knew she had hurt.

Going into Rudolf's rooms she gathered him into her arms. She kissed his warm body, his shiny face, his hands, his feet. Tears poured down her face. If she were only free to really mother him! At that moment Sophie appeared. Imperiously the dowager commanded the nurse to place His Royal Highness in his crib—where he belonged at this hour. What, she

asked Elizabeth, did she think Rudolf was, a doll? Something to be played with—like an ordinary child?

"I'm saying good-bye to him—I'm leaving the Hofburg," Empress Elizabeth answered.

The Archduchess cried out for her smelling-salts. One of the particularly insidious ladies-in-waiting came rushing in to inquire what all the commotion was about. Elizabeth eyed her coldly.

"The Pearl of Possenhofen," Sophie said, "is leaving."

Elizabeth added:

"For an indefinite stay in Madeira!"

PART TWO

Her Heroic Age

EMPEROR ELIZABETH THE BEAUTIFUL

C H A P T E R I

HORNS

" Those were my heroic years——"

FROM ELIZABETH'S DIARY.

Elizabeth stood on the deck of her yacht, *Fantasia*, sailing, sailing over the shimmering water straight into the sunset. Porpoises sported off the bow. Seagulls circled the mast—white-winged heralds of freedom. Sails silhouetted against twilight's vanguard shadows. Softness of evening crept closer to smooth the sharp white roughness of the sea. Dreams—yesterday, to-day, to-morrow—

It was her first day at sea. Behind her the drab, grey walls of the Hofburg seemed to lurk in the gathering blackness. Before her—promise, promise of life, freedom! "The last word in modernity," the ship company officials had assured her, when she chartered the splendid craft now straining beneath her feet. And there was nothing Hapsburgian about its trim lines, its luxurious equipage, its speed and trustworthiness.

"By all means, bathrooms!" Elizabeth had ordered.

The Empress's yacht bath was a huge tiled room lined with full-length mirrors, her special design. It was as large as her boudoir, as dainty and as luxuriously furnished. Added to the usual fixtures was an ivory and mother-of-pearl massage-table, a couch covered in white silk. Cabinet, table and chairs all fitted in an opalescent colour scheme that expressed her æsthetic taste.

Her salon was consistent with the standard of expen-

sive simplicity that characterized her suite. It was done in soft shades of orchid, ivory and apple green. The prevalent taste and tone of this Victorian period were lurid reds, drab greens, and countless whatnots as decoration.

The crew was selected with care. From captain to potato-peeler they were choice specimens. The Empress went so far as to assume virtual command.

A connoisseur of dainty food, Elizabeth installed a French *chef* to lord over the kitchen. None of the heavy, greasy concoctions that spread women's waist-lines! What was more, Hapsburgian eating hours—dietcally absurd—were abolished.

Her retinue, a small one, consisted of a few personal servants, a lady-in-waiting, and her secretary, Count Imry Hunyadi, a Hungarian of noble birth.

She wrote Duke Max that all the yacht lacked was an "Elizabeth Flag," which would, if she had her way, consist of a rainbow on an azure background!

The yacht sailed from Trieste. The route lay around the toe of the Italian boot, through the Straits of Gibraltar, on beyond the shores of Africa to the Isle of Madeira. That, Elizabeth thought, would be far enough from Sophie's tongue.

As Elizabeth stood alone, she clasped her slender hands in prayer.

"God look over and protect my babies," she murmured, "and protect them from all harm—oh, Angel Guardian, Blessed St. Anne—care for my Gazela and Rudi——"

She had just finished this prayer when Count Hunyadi appeared. Her Majesty was too deep in thought to notice.

"Pardon, Your Majesty——" Elizabeth started, turned to him. A light of pleasure lit up her eyes.

"Yes, Imry, what is it?"

"Your itinerary, Majesty—it is finished. Would you care to inspect it now?"

"Thanks, not just now. You may leave it on my desk."

"As you wish, Majesty."

"Please stay. I want to talk to someone who will understand—and keep my confidence. There is no one on board—except you—I can really trust——"

"My life is at your service." Hunyadi flushed as he bent over the hand she extended, kissed it reverently, straightened. As he came to attention their eyes met.

"That was one reason I chose you for my private secretary. And I hoped the post might please you."

The fervent expression in his eyes made answer unnecessary. The Empress had met and grown to like this Hungarian youth at Court balls. He had been her constant companion in long rides through the Prater, in long walks through the gardens of Schoenbrunn. So far no intimate discussions had occurred between them.

As long as the Empress lived beneath the same roof with Franz Joseph, she had been faithful to him. Now she turned to Hunyadi like some flower seeking the sun.

"Imry, some of the things I am going to tell you, you undoubtedly know. But I must talk to someone—and I feel I really can trust you. You must know the farce of wifehood—motherhood—I went through. God knows it was a bitter farce—I had not known life could scar me so. That's why I'm here now—to heal those scars—to regain the heritage of happiness that once seemed to be mine. I would have died in the Court—I must move—so you see, this yacht is a blessing to me. My life—what remains to me—I dedicate to escape—to freedom——"

Never before had Elizabeth confided in any one

except her father. Now she continued to unburden her heart to this young count.

"Every mean little parrot in the whole Court knows and gloats over Franz Joseph's infidelities to me—he doesn't care for any of those women. He loves only his wife—so he says—and proves it to me by—" Her voice broke off in a shudder. "Those years were like a nightmare, Imry."

Count Hunyadi paled—pressed his hands against the rail as if to steady himself. Elizabeth continued, "I was his wife, his brood mare—a chattel for his mother, his Court, his Empire. I was to breed—not as an Empress, but as a concubine. His mother usurped my right as head of my household. Spies hounded me at every turn. My babies were forbidden their mother's touch. And Franz—the man who calls himself Emperor—can only stare disapprovingly and hand me out a few stock phrases! I fought for my rights from the beginning to the very end. I lost. And so I've raised a new flag—my flag—Elizabeth's! I shall sail under it for the rest of my life!"

The Count clicked his heels together and saluted.

"My allegiance to that flag!"

"Tell me you'll always keep my confidences."

"I swear, Your Majesty."

Elizabeth sighed as Imry began speaking—haltingly.

"Her Majesty knows I am her slave. I have understood all—this—for a long, long time. And from the day she placed me in her service I have been a happy man. I even knelt down and thanked All Mighty God—a thing I'd not done since childhood."

The Empress drew closer.

"I too, Imry, had drawn away from the religion of my childhood. I simply could not pray at the Hofburg with Archduchess Sophie continually pushing me at God. I couldn't think of God as a revengeful monster as she did. To me He is merciful. I pray to Him

for my babies—and I'm nearer to Him here—far from Vienna church bells."

A light breeze came up from the south, chopping the silvery sea. The narrow craft started lurching. Hunyadi steadied the Empress with his arm—Hunyadi, the clean-cut Magyar—tall, slender, handsome, sensitive—the cabin lights shone on his dark hair. Elizabeth restrained an impulse to touch it—so soft, so inviting. She continued her thoughts aloud.

"Women who leave their babies and seek freedom are bad women—as a rule, I suppose, but I should have been driven mad if I had stayed in the Court—with the Archduchess forbidding me to touch my children—Imry, do you think I am a bad woman?"

"Her Majesty is an angel."

Two twenty-three-year-old youngsters sailing southern seas. Pale moonlight. Lullaby of the waves. Creak of sail. Romance wove a tender weave about these sentinels of freedom.

Elizabeth swayed against Imry. Blood rushed madly to his brain.

"Beloved—" he whispered. "You are my beloved—ever since the first day I saw you in the bleak old Hofburg! It was heaven to be with you—and now—now—to come with you on this voyage—I love—adore you—"

Elizabeth, her eyes two pools of tenderness, obeyed her impulse—she touched his hair. His arms closed gently around her.

Years of suffering had made the soil rich and warm for the blossoming of the "Dark Flower" deep within Elizabeth's heart. At last the bud of passion was to break forth in all its glory—strengthened and nurtured by the gentle waters of youth-fraught dreams. The

music of the gypsy bards of Hunyadi's land blended for Elizabeth a new symphony.

" My heart is like the ocean
With storm and ebb and flow—
And many a pearly treasure
Burns in the depths below."

Imry was reading Heine to Elizabeth. He shared her literary tastes. Their liaison was not without a strong æsthetic bond. The wet spray stung their faces as they sat close together—reading—talking—laughing the soft low laugh of lovers.

Elizabeth looked even younger than her twenty-three years—far younger than one who had suffered seven years of unhappy married life and had borne three children. A luxuriant mass of chestnut-brown hair grew from a point on her brow. Clean-etched, scimitar shaped eyebrows circled above almond-shaped eyes. Her eyes were deep set, dark, changeable—half veiled by long lashes. Her nose was small, straight, sensitive—"pert," Duke Max called it. A curved, determined mouth and a firm, cleft chin added character to her oval face. A long, shapely neck gave her an added touch of regality. Her body was a marvel of grace and slenderness. She would have made an ideal model for the Greek huntress, Diana.

Imry devoured her with his eyes.

" You're getting cold, darling," he cautioned. " Here, let me take you to your room." He accompanied her to the door of her cabin. She let her fingers rest a moment on his hair as he bent to kiss her hand.

" Come back, Imry, when you are dressed for dinner. We shall dine together in my suite."

" Alone?"

" Alone."

" I am dining with Count Hunyadi to-night—alone," Elizabeth informed her lady-in-waiting. " I'll

wear the orchid silk—my black pearls——” she ordered the maid.

The two women stared at her. What was Her Majesty up to now? Elizabeth went into her bathroom, undressed—studied her body carefully. Childbirth had left hardly a trace. Studying her body was a habit that was to extend through life. The very sight of it gave her joy. She meant to keep it as the Greeks did their temples. It was the temple of her soul, to be worshipped.

A Swedish masseuse came in after Elizabeth had completed her bath and rubbed her skin until it glowed. Then came the coiffeur. The burnished, dark brown tresses which fell far below her knees were brushed, perfumed and braided into a coronet.

Her maid adjusted the orchid satin slippers—the gown—the jewels. She felt like an enchanted princess in a child’s book.

Count Hunyadi knocked gently at the door of the dining salon.

“ Come in, Imry,” called Elizabeth.

She was waiting alone. Imry was pale, nervous—his eyes quivered as he kissed her hand. Elizabeth’s eyes filled with tears.

“ But, darling, why are you so unhappy ? ”

“ They’re happy tears, Imry. Really happy tears.”

He took her in his arms.

“ Do you think love is sin, Imry ? ”

“ Not to love is sin, my precious.”

“ I agree with you—not to love is sin. For love is no sin—God created love. Morality is entirely a question for one’s self. So long as no one else is hurt through love, no one ought to presume to judge it.”

Blue skies graced Madeira in February. The trim yacht sped swiftly along over the glistening whitecaps.

Back in Vienna a dull, murky river-fog clamped down on the city.

Count Imry, in white flannels, skin tanned to a golden brown, stood waiting on deck for Elizabeth. Each morning they walked a hundred times around the deck for exercise.

Elizabeth made her appearance in a smart, boyish suit of white linen. A bright orange scarf was tied around her throat. Already the little Empress was beginning to design her own clothes. Short skirts—right up over the shoe-tops, in the early sixties! Ultra-modernity!

"You look wonderfully sweet, darling, but how pale you are," Imry greeted her.

"I've had the most terrible dream!"

"Dreams don't mean anything, dearest—come! We'll walk it off."

"But, Imry——"

"Come on, precious. Let's see how fast we can make it for the first fifty times around the deck."

"No, you must listen to me. My dream is a bad omen. I'm afraid we're going to meet some fearful catastrophe. I dreamed of snakes last night. A great big horrible one wound itself around you—around your neck—strangled you——"

The Count started to laugh.

"You *would* eat that caviare last night, piglet."

"Don't laugh, Imry, I'm serious. It was awful. It started to eat you—crush you—I awakened screaming."

"My darling, you must forget about it. It is only a superstition. You're like a little child sometimes, dear. Come, let's walk it off. Everything will be all right."

Elizabeth fell in step with him.

"I'll never forget that dream."

That noon they landed in Madeira.

CHAPTER II

STYX

Superstition was forgotten as the party disembarked to take residence in the lovely old Spanish villa that had been prepared for them. Elizabeth went into ecstasies. For the first time in her life she was mistress of her household! Her word was law. She revelled in it, as she personally supervised the arrangement of her apartment.

From the trunks she brought lace pillows, mantelpieces, doilies—dainty feminine accessories which helped to give it all a homey aspect.

For her picture gallery she took out photos of Duke Max, Madi—her favourite “accidental” sister—her two babies, Gazela and Rudi, and one of her young cousin Ludwig, heir to the Bavarian throne. This Ludwig was a tall, graceful boy, for whom Elizabeth had a deep affection which was reciprocated.

Elizabeth busied herself with orders.

“We must,” she told Imry, “have big bowls for the short-stemmed roses. Be careful you don’t prick your fingers!”

Cheeks glowing, she fussed about, elated at her new sense of freedom.

“Do let’s walk a bit before dinner, Imry!”

The pair strolled through the garden.

“Isn’t this the most perfect place you ever saw?” Elizabeth asked. “We are so far away from everyone and everything. Just think! ‘Way off the coast of Africa.’”

“Thank Heaven for that, dearest!”

Madeira was a world made for lovers. Between long horseback rides they interspersed hours of leisurely reading and walking. Once more Byron and Blake and Heine and Dostoevski became living parts of their world. Neighbours were things not to be bothered, or to bother with. The simple fisher-folk of Madeira in their quiet dignity had no desire to intrude upon the beautiful isolation of Her Majesty. They admired and respected her. She was free from the gawking which annoyed her when she walked alone in Vienna. Now, she could even shop in the market-place without causing a commotion.

In the sharp coolness of the evening when the sea breezes sliced at the thermometer, logs burned cheerily in the fireplace. All night long the swishing music of the sea came playing through the open windows.

Three months slipped by.

Imry paced before the fireplace, a look of sorrowed tenderness on his handsome face. Elizabeth sat with an open book upon her lap. The fire flickered cheerfully, popping in protest as some resinous knot resisted cremation. He was first to speak.

"I should die if I had to leave you, dear one."

"But you'll never have to do that, Imry darling. I'm so happy we are together."

"Wish to God you were not an Empress—just a woman—my woman—just mine—all—every bit mine."

"Dear heart, I have never been 'Her Majesty' to you."

"I simply can't get over the fear that this is all a dream."

Laughing softly at him, Elizabeth walked over to the spinet.

"Darling, shall I play you some gypsy music?"

"Please do. I like to hear you sing in Hungarian."

Crooning, brooding, weirdly pathetic—crescendoing into gaiety, light braggadocio—the gypsy's song. Plaintive love song—breezes off the puszta! Elizabeth loved the Hungarian language—which she described as the “caress of sounds.”

Imry knelt, pressed his head to her knee. She smoothed his hair.

“I love you better than life,” he muttered softly.

Elizabeth was awed by this new-found emotion running rampant through her body. The touch of this Magyar opened a new world to her. Adolescence had fallen from her like a tired star—giving place to a new star in her firmament—passion. In a Magyar's strong arms the ice floes hurtled swiftly off to sea.

Madeira's “splendid isolation” cinbraced a code of living that needed interpretation to Franz Joseph—and his spies fully informed him of its exact meaning.

His great-grandfather, old Emperor Joseph, had founded and developed an elaborate system of secret service to keep the Imperial headquarters posted as to the dropping of an unruly pin in any part of the scattered dominions. In Franz Joseph's time, this system honeycombed all levels of society. Plots against the Emperor—and the Empire—were frequently discovered. Spies were even set upon spies. People were tortured on vague hearsay.

At this time the trusty spies were working extra conscientiously—in Madeira.

Elizabeth was late for dinner. Count Imry idled dreamily at the spinet—picking a few stray chords, wondering at her delay. How beautiful she was! How he loved her! What heaven he had known with her these scant few months! A smile of pleasure lit up his lean face as he heard her footsteps. He turned to greet her—saw that she was pale, distressed.

"What has happened? You look terrified."

"I am terrified, Imry—something terrible has happened. A hawk—I saw a hawk—it came close—so close to me! It is a sign of evil—we are doomed——"

"But, darling child, you frightened me so—was that all? Nothing but a hawk? You mustn't pay any attention to that——"

"Imry—Imry dear—it's the curse of the Hapsburgs—the evil sign—the hawk!"

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The village folk stood aside respectfully as a small squad of red-breeched officers marched up from the wharf below where a small ship flying the Austrian flag rocked at anchor.

A swarthy, moustached adjutant, leader of the party, called a halt, to ask the way to Her Majesty's villa.

A red-nosed fisherman volunteered the information. The squad set forward again. Through the green-covered gateway it marched. Then the leader knocked peremptorily at the door. It opened. The squad disappeared within the villa.

Elizabeth was reading to Count Hunyadi in the salon.

They got to their feet as the visitors were announced. The strangers bowed low.

"What do you wish?" the Empress asked in a hollow voice.

"Your Majesty, we bring a despatch from His Royal Majesty, Franz Joseph, to be presented to Count Imry in person."

"Let me have it."

Elizabeth took the parchment, her hands trembling as she read it. Then she sank to the divan.

Pale as a ghost Count Hunyadi took the document from her grasp.

"Count Imry Hunyadi is hereby commanded to

report at once to the Hofburg to receive sentence of exile——” he read.

Saluting, he dismissed the messengers.

The talons of the hawk had struck their prey.

“ So that’s how he acts for the best? ” Elizabeth’s lips formed an ugly grimace of bitterness. Then she sprang to her feet and paced the floor like a savage beast in a cage.

Imry stood silent—his hands clutching at the mantelpiece until the knuckles stood out white. This was what their escape had brought them! Even Africa was not far enough away to give them refuge from the Hapsburger.

Imry led her to her apartments.

“ Beloved Elizabeth,” he whispered, “ we shall go away from here together—change our names—destroy all trace——”

She pressed his arm in eager agreement.

“ Yes, my darling—now—now—before it is too late! ”

A door slammed—clamour in the hall-way—soldiers filled the room.

Too late—the private chambers of an Empress were not inviolate.

Count Hunyadi disappeared from her sight—for ever.

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The song was ended—almost before its first few chords had sounded—ashes—ashes—retrospect—again ashes. How clearly she remembered now the anxious advice of her father, Duke Max, before she had become a Hapsburg chattel. “ When you get to be Empress of those Austrians, Sisi,” he warned, “ they’ll find some excuse for depriving you of anything you begin to care for too much.”

She had laughed then. Poppie was so prejudiced. Now she stood before his picture.

“ You were more than right, Poppie ! They took my babies, my rights, my respect for the Emperor, and now they take away the only one I could care for and can be happy with ! ”

“ Your orders are to be ready to sail at once—to wherever you may choose.

ELIZABETH.”

The Captain of the Royal yacht fingered the note in surprise. What did the Empress have up her sleeve now ? He shrugged and went down to get his crew in action. Thank goodness he had the craft in tip-top shape. In a scant few hours the yacht was skimming with the wind—towards Africa.

The Empress slowly paced the deck. Sorrow had stricken her dumb. She seemed to feel no sorrow—to have lost the power of suffering. The gathering black clouds to the leeward attracted her attention.

They were running into a storm. The sun was blotted from the heavens. The wind began to whistle, twist, almost tearing the ropes from the hands of the sailors hurriedly reefing in sail. The boat began to rock crazily. The storm was upon them. Raging, moaning, tearing—the black ocean slapped in fury. A seaman, seeing the Empress, rushed forward.

“ Please get below at once, Your Majesty ! It is going to be a terrible storm ! ”

Elizabeth ignored him. She was fascinated by nature’s showmanship. The boat swayed, tossed—almost hurled the sky-high waves that slashed their white spray against her cheeks. The wind whipped her clothes against her body. Rough caress of a drunken giant !

Elizabeth fingered the tiny revolver resting in her pocket. Duke Max had given it to her once, saying it would be a good thing for her to have in time of need. A few moments ago the need seemed urgent—life had

been as dull and as monotonous as the ocean. But now, she felt alive with the waves! Shaking off the arm of the would-be helping sailor, she made her way slowly forward. She had thought of a use for her weapon.

Two sailors were struggling to lash a sail in place. Elizabeth grasped the nearest by the arm. His mouth opened in astonishment. What was the Empress doing on deck at such a time?

"Come with me at once," she ordered. "You too!"

They followed dumbly—frightened, submissive—trying to regain their wits. Speech returning to them they tried to calm her, get her below. She turned to face them.

"You who are powerless to calm the sea cannot calm your distracted Empress! I tell you we are the same." She tossed her head wildly. "Lash me to the mast! I command you. Lash me to the mast!"

They stared at each other stupidly. There could be no mistaking what she had ordered.

"Quick!" The tiny pearl-handled pistol gleamed menacingly. "I mean what I said."

One sailor grasped a piece of rope. The other fell to his knees.

"For the sake of Christ, Your Majesty——" At the point of the pistol, he went to assist his companion. He had seen the murder light in eyes before. Together they tied her fast to the mast. Tied her, until the ropes cut her delicate flesh. Tied her, until her body was secure; then they ran to call the Captain.

"Don't dare to touch me—any one—until I give orders!" Elizabeth cried out fiercely.

Striking—clutching—hurling ice-tipped lashes of spray. The storm beat itself out on the heaving breast of an Empress whose eyes matched the savage storm!

This was the only time Elizabeth's conduct justified

the Court rumour that she was as mad as most of the Wittelsbachs.

"Æons of time were concentrated in the half-hour that the Empress remained lashed to the mast," reads the diary of one of the attendants. "She seemed to calm and be calmed by the sea."

"Her Majesty's first word upon returning to her suite were, 'There was no danger—and what if there was? How many times must I declare my principles and ideas about the length of life which is allotted to each of us? We live so long as God permits, and if I have been entrusted with a mission here below, Providence will protect me from every danger!'

"Her Majesty then called for the two seamen who had fastened her to the mast and presented them with purses of gold—asking them to forget the 'incident.'

Elizabeth's attendants were evidently loth to forget such a choice tale. The news caused a sensation in Vienna. Franz Joseph had to get up particularly early to set puppets of suppression into motion—his underlings that suppressed by day, year or eternity.

The official reports denied that it happened.

"Her Majesty, the Empress Elizabeth, is enjoying a pleasant rest cruising in southern waters on board the Imperial yacht," the people read in the papers.

CHAPTER III

SHADOW

When Elizabeth and Franz Joseph as newly-weds had toured Lombardo-Venetia, the ancient Field-Marshal Radetzky had been deposed in favour of Prince Maximilian, younger brother of the Emperor.

Maximilian had reversed the policy of the previous Governor-General. The youngster, next in rank to his brother the Emperor, was a democrat at heart and ruled with a sympathy and honesty that did much to alleviate the tension between conqueror and conquered. Elizabeth had declared that he was the only civilized being in the Hofburg.

Maximilian's sudden popularity aroused the suspicion and antipathy of his elder brother. He was obviously jealous of Maximilian's "success."

The youthful Governor-General's life became a succession of rebukes, petty insults and rejections of recommendations. He found it tragic to see the Austrian power crumbling under his fingers. The Italian patriots were slowly undermining this Austrian stronghold which he attributed to the Emperor's stubbornness. His advices to the Emperor became more and more pointed. Suppression must give way to co-operation before the volcano erupted and tore off a sector of the Austrian frontier.

Franz Joseph's advisers were full of warnings. "His Majesty was right in continuing the original policy."

There might have been some justification in the Emperor's suspicions. Maximilian, a favourite of the Italians, began to dream of a constitutional kingdom

of Lombardo. He had married the pretty Belgian princess, Charlotte, when she was but sixteen. It was a love match and she shared a place in public esteem comparable to that of her husband's.

War sent their hopes slithering down Tyrolean peaks with the Austrians getting soundly spanked. Maximilian found himself deprived, by the peace of Zurich, of almost everything except command of a Navy whose principal port was Trieste. He was a big frog in a little puddle.

"If the Italians attack Miramar, Charlotte and myself will be murdered in our own home!" he wrote Franz Joseph, begging reinforcements. "And there is no reason why they should not!"

Franz Joseph stroked his growth of fuzz. What a nuisance was this brother of his!

Franz Joseph's own unpopularity with his subjects made him fear for his throne. The crown was getting heavier and heavier, and he was having less and less reason for self-congratulation. History had shown him how easy it was to change monarchs—to substitute a "people's favourite." Maximilian was in line with the democratic ideals of the times. What could be more dangerous? Something had to be done about Maximilian.

A political intrigue, with a new, rich country at stake, was taking place in Europe at that time. Franz Joseph smiled.

Why not send Maximilian to Mexico, as Emperor of the Mexicans? This seemed ideal. It would satisfy Maximilian's ambition to be Emperor—and would leave the Austrian throne safe.

Maximilian, upon hearing the news, at first was not enthusiastic. But Charlotte greeted the plan with enthusiasm. She, woman-like, would adore being Empress.

Elizabeth received the news with trepidation. She knew Franz Joseph too well to believe he was inspired by anything but selfish motives. She knew little of Mexico and the chaotic situation there. But she was sceptical.

She was fond of Maximilian and his bride. She had praised him at the Hofburg, so much that Franz Joseph had eyed her with disapproval. Now she longed to talk to "Maxi" and see if she could not remove some difficulty from his path.

"To Trieste," she ordered the Captain. "I'm going to Miramar. Two love birds are there in the shadow of the hawk!"

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When at last Elizabeth sighted Miramar—it seemed like a mirage upon the horizon. This white marble castle built after Maximilian's design jutted out over the rocks on the shore of Trieste, against a background of forest and amethystine hills. It looked like some spiritual Valhalla wrapped in nacreous veils, poised in the clouds!

The shadow of the hawk rested lightly on the shoulders of the handsome Maxi and the piquant Charlotte as they waved excitedly from the pier at the Imperial yacht, bobbing cheerily after its long run.

Elizabeth's eyes lit up with appreciation as she stood in the bow of the light skiff that was being pulled swiftly shorewards by the four strong pairs of sea-tanned arms.

"At last, Majesty, you are here," said Maximilian, after the boat had touched the dock and the first greetings were over. "We worried for fear the storms might uncomfortably delay you."

"But I love storms, Maxi," Elizabeth smiled. "You must both call me Elizabeth. Don't let us have any Hofburg puppet play here. Let's be ourselves—for this visit at any rate!"

Her last visit had been in company with the Emperor. It had been a duty call, intensely boring to Elizabeth.

Morning found a refreshed Elizabeth.

"To the garden," she called to Maximilian, once the formalities of breakfast were done with. "Show me what's new and lovely here!"

Maxi laughed boyishly. The gardens were his wonderland. Along shaded paths, the shy, sparkling dew lingered fatal moments on the leaves and grass before the sun searched it out. Bamboo trees nodded to Siberian arollas as guest breezes filtered through their boughs. Shaggy firs waved to floppy-leaved banana plants. Sedate date palms, dainty French poplars, palmetto clustered like a reception committee. An olive branch of silver, velvet-foliaged magnolias, perfumed the air. Fountains sprang up to toss gaily in the sky—stone gargoyles were merrily gargling!

Arm in arm Elizabeth and Maximilian walked along the promenade, an avenue of superb sycamores leading to the greenhouses whose glass walls gave shelter to one of the finest and rarest collections of orchids existent. Elizabeth thrilled to their quiet splendour.

"How truly marvellous, Maxi," she enthused.

"Orchids remind me of you, Elizabeth."

She gave him a grateful smile, as they walked down to the foot of the rocky cliffs of Miramar, where sea plants, polypi, were resting in shallow pools of water. And while the waves awakened, yawned, sing-songed, the two talked.

"Tell me, Maximilian, is it true, this rumour I hear, that you are to be sent to Mexico—to go Empire building there?"

"Too true, I'm afraid, my dear. His Royal Majesty has made his wishes known. I can do nothing but obey."

" But you will have to give up all this paradise ! All that you have loved and worked for ! "

" I know, Elizabeth. It will almost break my heart to leave here. But perhaps it's better that I go before the Italians advance and burn Miramar with Charlotte and myself inside. Franz is stubborn in his refusal to reconcile the Italians and yet he refuses to send more soldiers here. My Montenegrins couldn't hold out long against such force as the Italians would bring."

" Ach Gott, the Emperor ! He would not be the one to bring his brother happiness, especially when his brother enjoys such a universal popularity. What an Emperor you would make, Maxi ! "

" You know it is treason—even to say that, Sisi ! "

They laughed into each other's eyes. " I don't suppose any of Franz's policemen are hiding under the cactus—around here—do you ? "

" They'd probably pick a smoother place, but be careful anyway, dear."

" Don't worry about me now, Maxi. Isn't Mexico a horribly uncivilized place ? Won't it be awful for Charlotte ? You poor children ! "

" There are worse places in the world. One of them is—under the Emperor's nose. He can't get it in his head that I don't want his sceptre. Charlotte and I have talked things over and we agree there is a great opportunity for us in Mexico. I'm really excited at the prospect of being my own master ! What a reform programme I'll put into operation ! You should see the book I'm working on ! "

" That's wonderful, Maxi ! Poppie would love to talk things over with you. I'm glad Charlotte is happy about it. But, be on your guard. All is not quite clear in my mind as to how far the jealousy of Franz Joseph would lead him. Possibly, this time he has conceived something good for you which may also benefit himself."

" I hope so too. I can't feel that it will be all bad

over there. And just imagine! Mexico is indeed a large territory. They have need for a guiding hand."

"Hardly the guiding hand of a Hapsburger."

"Of an 'enlightened' Hapsburger—schon! Frankly though, Elizabeth, I doubt many times that I am a real Hapsburger."

Impulsively Elizabeth turned to him.

"Please let me say something to you, Maxi. I have often thought of it. When I think of the poor idiot father of Franz Joseph—and the rumour that Archduchess Sophie loved Napoleon's son at the time you were born—" Elizabeth hesitated.

"You think—"

"I have often thought you are the son of the King of Rome, L'Aiglon—sometimes I think I can see a resemblance!"

Maximilian smiled.

"I would not know about that, Sisi. Although I was supposed to be a wise child! It is true that mother's rumoured romance with Napoleon's son was going on at the time of my conception."

Elizabeth sobered, spoke seriously.

"Napoleon Bonaparte was—and always will be, in my opinion, one of the world's greatest heroes."

Maximilian refused to enter into her serious moods. They continued to discuss the family.

"I can quite understand poor Ludwig Victor being the son of—your mother's husband."

Ludwig Victor, youngest brother of the Emperor, was born to wear skirts. After making one scandal after another, thereby humiliating his brother, the Emperor, and making a laughing-stock of the whole family by his effeminate eccentricities, Ludi was sent to retirement in Salsburg with a burly keeper and a retinue of servants, spending the remainder of his days "resting" in a lonely old castle there. The second youngest brother, Archduke Karl Ludwig, normal enough, was married off to a Princess Annonciade of Bourbon-

Sicilies. His ill-treatment of the women he maintained was notorious.

Annonciade possessed the same smug self-righteousness as Sophie, and the two women doted on each other. History knows Annonciade best as the mother of Franz Ferdinand, who became a martyr—the match that lit the World War tinder.

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The next morning Maximilian resumed the conversation in regard to his plans of becoming Emperor.

"It looks as if I will have ample support now," he said. "I've received assurance that Great Britain, France, Belgium and possibly Spain will stand beside me. Otherwise I wouldn't really consider the proposition in spite of the odds against me here."

"If the rest of the countries are as crooked as 'Oesterreich' you'll be out of luck all round. But of course that couldn't possibly be so."

"No, not possibly so."

"Tell me more of your plans."

"Oh, I've lots of ideas," he continued, boyishly enthusiastic. "I've even planned my uniform!"

"I hope it won't have red pantaloons!"

"No danger, Sisi. I hate those 'flaming pants' almost as much as you do!"

"They are horrible."

"You'll like the one I intend having—at least I think you will, because mine is going to be really romantic! It is going to be the short 'undress' jacket of an Austrian admiral. Just a soft white shirt, soft collar with flowing tie and fringed black Mexican pantaloons held at the waist by a bright silk sash. And for head covering—a wide-brimmed hat like the American cowboys wear! It's going to be my only uniform."

"Sounds wonderful, Maxi!"

"And you'll be glad to hear that I intend being a

good liberal. I'm going to deal fairly and squarely.
No snobbery, no intrigue, no sneaking spying."

"What an Empire that would be!"

Like two children building castles in the air, they sat and talked. Little did Maximilian guess that already above him and his pretty wife, the shadow of doom was hovering.

CHAPTER IV

HUSSY

It was Elizabeth's second year away from Franz Joseph. She was now twenty-five years old and in Paris, at the Hotel Continental.

In travel, excitement, clothes, theatres, books, art, music, she was desperately trying to numb her hunger for her children.

With her was Hélène, now Princess of Thurn and Taxis. Elizabeth's oldest sister was still the quiet, serious type of woman whose natural reticence had been intensified by a miserable unhappy marriage.

To make the most of her Paris adventure, Elizabeth decided that Duke Max must be brought upon the scene. Since her marriage, Duke Max had not lacked money. He arrived in tremendous fettle. Dressed up in his "city clothes" he was like a Possenhofen breeze to the Empress. Every one from page-boy to manager in the Continental became his bosom friend! He treated them all to stories about his family, legitimate and otherwise. He brought out his store of jokes. Even recited some of his poetry. Here was an appreciative audience.

Elizabeth opened a hand-tooled edition of Heine and read:

"France looks like a garden where one picks the most beautiful flowers to bind them into a bouquet—and that bouquet is called Paris!"

"I like everything that fellow writes," said Max. The *rapport* was once more secure.

When the "girls" went on their shopping tours, the Duke was a tireless companion. His eye for beauty found hearty satisfaction in the pretty models. At Worth's he succumbed to the charms of an especially beautiful mannequin.

Elizabeth laughed indulgently, and reminded him that he had free rein to order whatever jewels he wished, at any shop on the Rue de la Paix.

"Give her something really lovely, Poppie," said Elizabeth. "I admire your taste—for beauty—and I'm with you, on your side, always!"

Feminine styles of 1862 were created principally for Empress Eugenie of France. Tight bodices, puffy sleeves, voluminous stiff skirts adorned with amazing fol-de-rols—flounces of rare lace—festoons of rich flowers, trains of thick embroidery. When a lady of that epoch walked, she swished!

"How do you like this costume, Poppie?" Elizabeth was parading before him in a taffeta dress with exaggerated wide skirts.

"Gott im Himmel, Sisi—it has everything possible hung on the outside. Why don't you have chimes hung on the inside—or say a music-box—if you must have novelty!"

"You've got the right idea, Poppie." Elizabeth laughed, and turning to the proprietor she added:

"I agree with my father, Monsieur Worth. I hate these styles you are making. I think they are horrible."

"Yes, Your Majesty, but what can I do? They are the styles of the moment."

One could do something. Elizabeth designed a few special dresses herself, which Maison Worth carried out. They were Grecian in design, clinging to the figure, yet allowing freedom, in fact dresses that were more 1932 than 1862. These, however, she never wore in public. She was not yet sufficiently sure of her taste

to go against the popular modes. That was to come later.

One day late in the afternoon Duke Max came into the apartment of the Empress. She was weeping bitterly. Scattered about the room were the newest dresses.

"Why, Sisi, what is the matter?"

She turned her tear-stained face to his.

"Poppie—"

He took her in his arms. She unburdened her heavy heart to him. Told him of Hunyadi—of Maximilian—and now of her babies, for whom she longed.

Max soothed her.

"There, there, Sisi! Things will come out all right. As for Hunyadi—that's all past. You mustn't worry about him now. And Maximilian is sensible. He will be sure to come out with colours flying—a fellow with such fine, human ideas—and the power to execute them! Now, darling, we'll just see what we can do about these babies of yours."

"If I were an ordinary citizen anywhere in the world the law would be all on my side—and I could have my babies! As an Empress I have no rights at all. I am tied hand and foot. I am not allowed to pet my own babies. They have no mother."

"If I had anything to do about it I'd punish those—"

"Oh, Poppie! I wish I were a gypsy, a—anything, so long as I might be really free!"

"Well, there's one thing you can do. You can go straight to Vienna, and have it out with them. You won't ever be happy in this state of mind."

"Yes, I must go back," and as a feminine after-thought she added, "They'll pay attention to me—if it's only to see the latest styles from Paris!"

"They'll look at you, Liebling, if you ride in there as Lady Godiva did—with nothing on but her hair—"

"You know my hair comes a way below my knees now, Poppie."

"When you're back in Vienna I wish you'd have your portrait painted for me with that lovely hair hanging down—"

Elizabeth promised, a promise she was to fulfil.

A special train was ordered.

"We Wittelsbachs move fast once we get going!" chuckled Duke Max.

Sophie and the Court received the news of the impending visit of the Empress with sneers. Her Majesty would get a fine reception! No decent person would have anything to do with her. Elizabeth, they said, had ruined herself with the people by leaving the dear Emperor to shoulder the crushing duties of state. An Empress' place was with her husband. Not gallivanting around the world, without even a proper chaperone. She'd learn a lesson once she saw what the people thought of her!

But it was Sophie who would learn a lesson. For at Elizabeth's return to Vienna, the people went wild with joy.

Elizabeth had touched the people's heart in a tender place. Sophie's cruelty to her daughter-in-law was no secret in Vienna. Every one knew that Elizabeth had been deprived of her children by the flint-hearted dowager.

"Her Majesty's ride to the Hofburg was the signal for the greatest demonstration ever given a monarch in the history of the Austrian Empire," the press at that time declared. Years have yet to change that record.

Horse guards fought with difficulty to keep the enthusiastic bystanders from crowding about the Royal carriage.

"Elizabeth! Elizabeth! Elizabeth!"

"Hoch!" on every tongue.

Franz Joseph sat rigidly beside her, mysteriously calm. Was it surprise or jealousy that gripped his heart?

Surprise, jealousy, anger and hysteria combined to make a mess out of Sophie.

The day was all Elizabeth's.

Once the gate of the Hofburg had closed behind her, Elizabeth made straight for the nursery. Etiquette, formality, custom—all fell from her shoulders.

Four-year-old Rudi was ushered into Her Majesty's presence, dressed up in a soldier suit. She swooped down to him, gathered him in her arms—knocked his soldier hat to the floor.

Sophie, puffing with the unusual effort of getting so much heft into so much motion, arrived a bit late. The vision that greeted her set her aghast. Elizabeth looked as if she were going to turn cannibal and eat up one perfectly good heir to the throne. Sophie hastily called in Gazela, now six, in an effort to divert Elizabeth from her "terrible" caresses. The Empress took both children on her lap.

"She not only devoured them with her eyes," wrote Sophie to her other daughter-in-law, Annonciade, "but acted in such an unrestrained fashion one thought her capable of literally devouring them."

Gazela was far from being a pretty child. But she did have a quaint eager personality.

Rudi, on the other hand, was not only very beautiful, but had developed strong personal characteristics. He was brave, generous, exceedingly clever and not a little headstrong.

Elizabeth did not leave her children until they were bathed and put to bed and she had kissed them and promised not to go away.

"Tell Nurse I have a Mama—like other little boys," Rudi confided to her.

"And a Mama that loves you so-o-o much!" Elizabeth whispered to him.

Sophie was furious! Her Majesty had dared to order Rudi's nurse away for the night and had slept beside his little bed herself!

"Elizabeth is up to her old tricks," the Archduchess informed the Emperor. "What sentimental nonsense—sleeping in the child's room!"

Franz Joseph shrugged.

"Sisi is too much for me," he said.

"My poor Franzl," moaned Sophie. "Sie—I want to tell you something."

She refused to use the intimate personal pronoun "du" as Elizabeth did. Sophie contended that only God Himself could say "du" to the Emperor. This was just another reason for her to hate her daughter-in-law.

"Sie, Franzl—I think Elizabeth is insane. All the Cardinals will believe it. She is insane—the doctors will tell you so. They will tell the people so. You should have her locked up. Remember, Franz—you are Emperor."

The Emperor recoiled. This was too far for even a mother given to extremes. He was back of her almost without limit. "That goes without saying," he assured himself. But this was too much. Calling Sisi crazy was decidedly not the way out.

"You women can certainly be relentlessly cruel to each other," he said.

Sophie plopped into a chair.

"What an ungrateful son—just when I am trying to help you most, Franz, you accuse your mother of being cruel."

She started sniffling.

He considered each of his half a score of stock phrases. Not one of them sufficed for this new situation. He said nothing. Sophie continued blubbering.

"I have racked my brain the whole night long for a solution to this problem. And now I believe there is no other way out. If you have her locked up for the insane creature she is, the Holy Father would annul your marriage. Then you can marry a lovely, good, sweet Princess who will do exactly as we say——"

"Mother, please never speak to me of this again. So long as Elizabeth lives she is my wife." Moving nervously he added, "She will be no one else's wife. From the day I met Sisi I loved her—unfortunately Sisi and I are different from each other—in many ways—we have never understood each other—probably never will."

The Emperor reverted to the cold, harsh tone he used in times of rough going.

"It is a most unhappy, unfortunate situation and we must act for the best," he concluded.

Sophie's face was hidden in her handkerchief.

"Mother, you must know I will absolutely uphold you—as has always been my custom—in matters concerning the children."

Sophie clutched at this straw. It was not to be sneezed at. Being supreme in matters concerning the children was almost power enough for one mother-in-law. She would go immediately and show who was who about this place.

Rudi's baby voice piped up bravely.

"Yes, go away—you don't never want to play—Mama, Liebe Mama, me and you——"

A stalwart nurse caught him in her arms and bore him off as he kicked vigorously. Gazela, more meek, was taken by the hand and led away. Save for Elizabeth and her mother-in-law, the nursery was empty.

The Empress was the first to speak.

"I command you to leave the care of the children to me," she said in her soft low voice, which always infuriated Sophie.

Sophie lost control.

" You hussy! Just because you received such an ovation from that cheap mob you dare to speak so to a decent woman! "

" I beg of you——"

" Slut—harlot—you dare command me! I am mistress of this palace—of this country. *I* command you to leave this nursery at once. Go! Get out before I have you thrown out."

In her opinion, Sophie's language may have been biblical, but a host of attendants who could hear her screaming filthy names after Elizabeth were shocked. It formed a delectable bit of small talk for the Court.

Running swiftly down the huge halls, Elizabeth made her way to the Emperor's apartments. She burst unceremoniously into his study.

" Du—Franz—I have come back—to my children, as I told you I would. I am hungry for them, I love them. Are you going to permit your mother to put me out of their rooms? Tell me, Franz, tell me at once! "

" Now, Sisi, now——" he started to hedge.

Elizabeth's eyes flashed dangerously. Her modulated voice was low, clear—yet each syllable seemed to cut like a whip.

" I have returned to you for our children's sake—I love them so—I want them near me always. You are going to give me a direct answer! This is no time for a stock phrase. Do you agree to send your mother away from the Hofburg—and allow me to rear our children as I see fit? Think carefully before you answer me, Franz—and I wish you to say one of two words—yes—or—no! "

The Emperor straightened, looked abruptly away from the beautiful face—now so beautiful, now so pleading.

" No "

C H A P T E R V

VENDETTA

Miles of low, flat plain swept away in every direction. Scant tufts of puszta grass drooped meekly under the spring sun. Into an ocean of distance the horizon danced crazily. A small dust cloud spiralled skyward.

A lone rider was approaching. The rider was a woman, but her clothes were modelled after those of a boy. She sat her horse like a true Cziskos, the cowboy of these Hungarian plains. Riding slowly, humming bits of a gypsy song, she watched ahead for signs of the herdsmen's encampment. Her horse snorted, tossed his head petulantly. Not far to go. A herd of browsing horses looked at her askance.

At last she came to a "chuck" wagon, surrounded by Cziskos, swarthy-skinned herd tenders, wild citizenry of the Magyar prairies.

They gathered about her as she dismounted. She answered their greetings in their own tongue, then passed about a supply of Turkish tobacco she took from her pocket. She sat down to smoke with them and asked to see their horses.

When several semi-wild creatures, prancing, quivering, tossing their sleek heads, were led before her, she became enthusiastic.

"Our horses please Your Majesty?" smiled a huge Cziskos, doffing his wide-brimmed hat.

"What wonderful animals," answered Elizabeth. "How I should like to spend my life on these Hungarian prairies—just tending those splendid creatures."

Romance was woven into the very costumes these plainsmen wore—long white linen smocks with wide flowing sleeves embroidered in barbaric colours, wide-brimmed hats, flat-topped Hungarian “ sombreros,” bearing some decoration—a few fresh flowers, a bunch of puszta or prairie grass, or a heron’s feather.

They performed for her. A Cziskos slung a rope halter over the head of an almost full-grown colt, then sprang lightly on his back. The youngster reared, bolted madly, sought to buck the uninvited burden from its back. But the rider balanced gracefully, synchronizing his body with that of the beast. Finally the animal tired, faltered, became obedient. The Cziskos, riding up in front of the Empress, dismounted.

“ Bravo, Istvan, bravo ! ” she approved. “ That was beautifully done ! ”

Turning to the chief herdsman, she announced, “ I must try that—no curb, no saddle, no rein, no bit, no whip ! I must try it ! ”

“ Your Majesty will find it more dangerous than it looks.”

“ The livelier the better, Stephan.” Despite the consternation and protests of the Cziskos, she chose one of the untrained colts. Before any one could stop her she was upon him.

The taunt, slender rider clove to the charging, rearing horse.

Like a centaur they spun round in circles, zigzags, sudden starts and stops. Bucking and snorting, the wild-eyed steed sought to throw this light burden from his back.

The herdsmen watched her speechlessly. What an equestrienne—what a woman ! What an Empress ! Absorbed in Her Majesty’s showmanship, none of the group noticed the arrival of a lone horseman. He dismounted, tied his horse, walked over to the group of Cziskos.

"Who's the new boy riding there, Istvan? He looks like a comer."

Istvan eyed his questioner with humorous glint in his eye.

"Empress Elizabeth of Austria."

"Mmm—" The new-comer's smile was not so agreeable.

Elizabeth, after conquering the colt, dismounted and rejoined the group. She was breathless, laughing, full of the madcap vigour of the horse she had just dismounted. Her eyes fell upon the new-comer—narrowed, hardened with dislike. She recognized him. He was Count Elemer Batthyani, "the handsomest man in Hungary."

A scarcely concealed sneer distorted his lips as he bowed.

"Her Majesty's horsemanship is indeed superb. I took her for a herd boy. It did not seem possible Her Majesty could ride like a little *gaucho*."

"Conceited ass," thought Elizabeth. She had always thought so. She said, "Thanks, Count Batthyani. You flatter me greatly." Then, turning abruptly, she joined Stephan. Stars were beginning to spangle the heavens. Coolness of night was chasing the thick hot air of the day.

Over the bright fires of sun-parched dung hung pots of goulash bubbling merrily. Meat, vegetables, paprika—the herdsmen's standby. The hungry crowd surrounded the pots, puffed at their "before-dinner" smokes. There was nothing in their manner to reveal they were in any way impressed by the distinction of their guests.

Batthyani joined Elizabeth as she watched the dancing flames. She said nothing. The Count eyed her curiously, then began speaking.

"I had thought Your Majesty was supposed to ride only the safest mounts—at special hours—and places."

Once more the faint sneer betrayed insolence.

"The present Empress of Austria does what she pleases when, where and how she pleases."

"That goes without saying," parried Batthyani, mocking Franz Joseph. "But I did not imagine that these wild horses and these barbaric people would please Your Majesty."

"I like savage horses and I like——" She faced him. "I love these people of yours!"

"Because you think you can master them?"

Elizabeth gave him a disapproving look, then dropped her eyes. A slight smile twitched at the corner of her mouth. Ordinarily she would have tolerated but little of this raillery. But she understood his bitterness.

Count Louis Batthyani, father of Elemer, had been one of the greatest of Hungarian premiers. He had worked for a reconciliation between the Emperor and Hungary. But Franz Joseph, without a grain of evidence against the elder Batthyani, sentenced him to death.

Eugene Bagger tells the story briefly in his biography of the Emperor:

"On the eve of his execution his wife smuggled a dagger to him and he slashed his throat so as to avoid the disgrace of the gallows. His awful wound was dressed, but it was found impossible to hang him. He was shot in the morning, in the same hour as the thirteen generals at Arad.

"Europe stood aghast.

"Even at the Austrian Court, this wallowing in blood was disapproved.

"Metternich himself (his wife records) was highly indignant over Batthyani's execution without even reasons stated.

"Ugly rumours filled the hiatus—it was whispered that the extremely handsome Batthyani had

to die because on a certain occasion he had mortally wounded the feminine vanity of Archduchess Sophie."

Elizabeth knew this story. She could be sympathetic towards this high-strung youth.

The firelight flickered on his classic profile. She noted the swarthy skin, broad shoulders, the small waist, his perfect proportions. Much too perfect. Elizabeth turned her eyes to the firelight again.

Batthyani was noticing that the Empress possessed something more than mere beauty of face and figure. When she rose to go over and pet a hobbled horse he was impressed by her real tenderness for the animal. What a thoroughbred to be the wife of a Hapsburger! A sort of new-mown hay perfume about her—contrasting, he thought dryly, with the odour of the horses, goulash and sweating Cziskos about them. She smiled faintly at him as she returned to her place at his side. Taking off her tight riding hat she loosened her long chestnut-coloured tresses!

They stared into the flames. A Cziskos came bearing a flask of wine, said the food was ready. Elizabeth and Elemer took an "appetizer" that whetted already ravenous appetites.

"Remember, Stephan," she called to the range boss, "we want to eat with you and your men, not alone."

The range boss nodded respectfully. She turned to Batthyani.

"In my own private religion all men are equal. I mean really equal!"

"I am surprised at the democracy of the Empress," Batthyani said sarcastically. "Having lived with that Hapsburg all these years, it is hard to think of Her Majesty as not being a Hapsburg—I don't even see how Her Majesty could have escaped from being smudged by them—probably she has been——"

"You should be horsewhipped for that!" she cried,

springing to her feet. "Horsewhipped—I'll—I'll call the herdsmen—"

The "handsomest man in Hungary" had struck a sore spot.

"Yes, Your Majesty," he sneered, "be a real Hapsburger."

The blow hit home. She faltered—tears came to her eyes.

Batthyani's bitterness left him—he made a despairing gesture. "I cannot help—my bitterness towards the Hapsburgs—perhaps you can understand."

"I'm their victim too, Elemer," she whispered, "and I know how you have suffered!"

Bending quickly, he picked up the flask of wine at his feet.

"Bruderschaft, Elizabeth!"

She nodded, they drank this intimate toast with clasped hands as they looked in each other's eyes. Firelight played on these two victims of the Hapsburgs, these two—adrift on the sea of a new-found passion.

The moon had reached its zenith as two riders disappeared into a clump of scrawny birch trees.

They were following a slender trail over the puszta—that led to Her Majesty's palace in Godollo.

CHAPTER VI

LAMB

On April 9, 1863, the Emperor's schemes for his brother's acceptance of the Mexican throne reached fulfilment.

In the ornate Gala Hall of Miramar, the Archduke Maximilian's castle near Trieste, members of the Austrian Court waited anxiously in little groups, their eyes ever turning towards the great staircase down which the Emperor must come with his longed-for news. Schonerling, the Premier, stood a little apart from the others, his heavy face set in grim lines, his fingers fiddling nervously with the decorations on his tunic. Success was, *must be*, assured. But . . . he shrugged, and stared once more at the staircase. There was always a but.

In the Archduke's bare study Franz Joseph, resplendent in Field-Marshal's uniform, sat at a desk piled high with maps and documents, while his brother stood behind him, looking over his shoulder.

At length the Emperor leaned back in his chair.

"It goes without saying," he began in slow, monotonous tones, "that I would not have consented to your acceptance of the Mexican Crown had I not been assured of the practicability of the plan and the vast possibilities of our family in the new world. The wealth of Mexico is enormous; the faith of the people is our faith; all that is needed to make Mexico a great country is the proper man at the head. You are entrusted with a most important mission. Upon your judgment and acts will depend the success of your

ordination, momentous alike before God, the Hapsburgs and the country. May All Mighty God guide you!"

The dull pomposity of the speech only served to increase Maximilian's indecision. He glanced from the maps of this glowing new world to his brother's expressionless face.

"Your Majesty," he answered, in a low voice, "I am deeply conscious, as Your Majesty must know, of the great responsibilities and risks that are involved in my mission, as well as the potentialities for a great Mexico. However, I feel that I am asked to make a very heavy personal sacrifice from the head of my family."

The Emperor's question cut sharp across his speech. "You mean the renunciation of your rights to the Austrian throne?"

"Yes. I wish you might see your way . . ."

"Impossible!" The Emperor spoke harshly. "Your Highness must realize how nonsensical any other procedure would be. No man can serve two countries."

Maximilian leaned forward; beseeching, supplicating:

"But, Majesty, what if something happened to the Crown Prince Rudolph? As the Empress has definitely left you I do not see any one to replace me as second in the line of succession. . . ."

His eyes met those of Franz Joseph, then dropped before that implacable gaze. Here was no brother: only a distant Royal Personage who brooked no argument.

"Enough!" said the Emperor coldly. "We will arrange that. It would be unthinkable both for Austria and the Mexicans for you to do otherwise. The law of succession is clear and is based upon experience and tradition. You will follow that. As you know I am considering your interest, have already advanced you

200,000 florins. Of course you understand that money is to revert to the family immediately after you take over your duties in Mexico."

Maximilian bent his head.

"The amount will be repaid in full as soon as it is possible. However, I may need the support of Austria, maybe Austrian troops: the United States will object to the establishment of a monarchy in Mexico."

"Object?" Franz Joseph smiled derisively. "You may rely upon us for support, but there will be no danger from the Union. Its hands are full in the war with the Confederacy, which, I understand, will welcome a monarch in Mexico. That backwoodsman Lincoln," he added scornfully, "may wave the 'Monroe Doctrine' in our faces, but we needn't be troubled about him."

"But suppose the North wins. . . ?"

"In that case, we will act for the best."

"Meaning?"

"Napoleon and myself will find a way to help you. England, you know, has refused to guarantee support."

Maximilian frowned: "That's strange. I understood Charlotte to say that her father could manage Queen Victoria."

"No one," said Franz Joseph simply, "can *manage* Queen Victoria. But this discussion is useless. I desire that you sign this document . . ."

"Is there no way . . . ?"

The Emperor rose, indicating with a wave of his hand the heavily sealed Act of Renunciation that lay on the desk before him.

"I have made my decision."

Maximilian took his vacated chair and bowed his head in his hands. On the one side Austria . . . beloved Austria: on the other the unknown, glittering Paradise of this land beyond the sea. Slowly he raised his head, took the pen in his hand, held it poised over the fateful

document. If he signed . . . ? Honour and glory and wealth. If he refused . . . ? Exile and death. He looked up at his brother and a sudden shivering, like that of ague, shook him. With a mute gesture of surrender he put his signature to the paper on the desk.

Down the great staircase Franz Joseph walked slowly, a smile of triumph curving his mouth. Behind him Maximilian clung weakly to the banister.

"Archduke Maximilian has signed the Act of Renunciation!"

There was a babel of confused sound from the waiting courtiers; then the Emperor strode through their ranks to the door.

"Maximilian!"

The Archduke straightened. He saw the great hall that he loved so well, the carefully disguised satisfaction on the faces of the courtiers, the erect figure of Franz Joseph with the Order of the Golden Fleece blazoned across his white tunic. And, in that fleeting instant, he had, perhaps, a vague premonition of the horror to which that scrawled signature was to lead him. Looking neither to right nor left, his steps ringing firmly on the floor, he crossed the hall and stood beside his brother.

The Emperor embraced him stiffly.

"Adieu, Maximilian."

"Adieu."

On June 11, 1863, Archduke Maximilian of Austria was proclaimed Emperor of Mexico in Mexico City.

This was brought about by Emperor Napoleon III of France, assisted by Franz Joseph of Austria.

The Austrian Emperor's motive was the removal of an heir apparent to the throne whose popularity and attractiveness contrasted disadvantageously with his own. The French Emperor's motive was primarily political aggrandizement and glory.

America received the news with intense indignation. It was a direct infringement on the Monroe Doctrine.

The American press called Maximilian "The Austrian Adventurer."

Empress Elizabeth of Austria, in a letter to Emperor Maximilian of Mexico, was frank.

"Don't be carried away, Maxi," she wrote, "by the music of a tin-pan Empire!"

But the music seemed to have a magical effect on Maximilian and Charlotte.

They danced to its tinkle—marionettes whose guiding strings stretched over the sea to Franz Joseph's stiff-backed chair in the Hofburg.

CHAPTER VII

CONFESSiON

Possenhofen Château on an April day in 1865 lay sleeping drowsily under a warm spring sun. The Lake of Starnberg reflected clear blue skies, scintillated with the touch of a vagrant breeze. In the short distance the Isle of Roses lifted its head out of the lake, its tree-tops beckoning, its rich undergrowth clustering along the shore.

Beneath the blossoming boughs of a gnarled old apple tree stood Elizabeth. She seemed preoccupied, watching. She held a staff bearing a small pointed flag, a pennon—such as mediæval knights would carry on their lances, a heraldic to spread terror in battle, to add prestige in war. Elizabeth's device looked less sinister. It bore a pure white dove embroidered on a field of azure blue.

Elizabeth wore a clinging dress of white Indian silk. It accentuated her long slender limbs and tiny waist. It was the antithesis of hoopskirts, the dictate for "ladies of fashion" of the time.

Back of her upon a rustic bench, her cloak of azure velvet, lined with sable, was spread.

The sound of footsteps came to her through the wood. She smiled. How well she recognized them, those footsteps! With his zither on his back, a rollicking tune on his lips, Duke Max came ambling on the scene.

"So there you are!" he called. After exchanging greetings, he recited Heine's "Du Bist Wie Eine Blume."¹

¹ Translation by Emma Lazarus.

"Thou seemest like a flower,
So fair and pure and bright ;
A melancholy yearning
Steals o'er me at thy sight.

I fain would lay in blessing
My hands upon thy hair ;
Imploring God to keep thee
So bright and pure and fair. . . ."

"Heine might have written that poem for you. You put me in mind of it when I first saw you to-day."

She put an arm about her father's shoulders.

"Poppie," she whispered awkwardly, "I must make a confession to you—I just can't keep things about myself from you—and I don't want you believing something—that's not true."

"There, there, Sisi, what isn't true?"

"That I am—the last line of Heine's poem."

"Well, you are to me, darling—I think—I think I know—what you're going to tell me. But you're young, Sisi—only twenty-eight. And what a beauty! It's only natural that you should be in love with someone."

"That's just the trouble. I thought I was in love—several times; I know now—that I wasn't. I'm always seeking—always searching for the perfect love. I haven't really found it yet."

Max whistled softly, and then—half to himself, "Not unlike your father."

"I repeat Heine expresses you in his poem."

Across the lake a small pennon of purple bearing an eagle and castle device waved a signal. Getting up from her resting-place Elizabeth grasped her own pennon and went to the shore. She waved answer.

"I must go, Poppie. It's Ludwig!"

A small boat started towards them from across the lake.

"How long has this been going on?" asked Duke Max.

" For a whole year. It's not anything that ever happened in the whole world! We write each other when we are separated—which is, of course, much of the time. He has named me, ' The Dove.' "

" And what, if I may ask, is his title? "

" Mountain Eagle."

" That's poetic—and apt. Well, he's a handsome chap, face like a grown-up cherub. But, dearest child, I hope you—er—understand about him."

" Oh yes, Poppie, but this affair is different. It has only to do with our souls—our spirits! "

Duke Max helped her into her blue coat, stroked the sable collar as if it were a beautiful wild animal he was taming—with kindness.

" God keep thee, my little flower," he murmured.

A small boat carrying on its prow a delicately fashioned swan touched the shore.

CHAPTER VIII

TOWARD THE BORDERLAND

Fifteen thousand bushes studded with roses gave the Isle its name—fifteen thousand centres of fragrance whisked about on the perpetual breeze. From their depths gleamed softly an Italian villa, like some great orchid amid roseland. It was a mid-Victorian bouquet—the leaves, the stems, the buds, in forced arrangement. From a distance the miniature isle was a child's dream of a cherub's playground.

Bavarian children knew the cherub owner of the Isle of Roses as their youthful king, Ludwig, the boy too beautiful to be a man. He was the centre of romantic fairy-tales like the chivalric legends of Hohen-schwangau—of the village of the Great Castle of the Swan, his boyhood home.

Ludwig II, they called him when he took the crown at eighteen. Ludwig, the “Mad King of Bavaria,” less kind history was to call him. “The Mountain Eagle,” he called himself.

At twenty he was six feet tall, proportioned much as was Elizabeth. The delicate features of his effeminate head were so similar to Elizabeth's that he could have been her twin brother. The country-side remarked and passed comment on this resemblance. His eyes were dark and deep like hers. His hair was of the same colour and texture—woodland brown waving upwards from an intellectually sensitive brow. Mouth and chin alone sought difference. Elizabeth's firm little chin and curved lips bespoke determination. Ludwig's mouth was wilful, his chin was weak.

It is difficult to describe Ludwig. That he was *mad* is a fact, but before this was definitely established he lived for a long while in the borderland.

With the exception of his cousin Elizabeth, he had a distaste for women. This had come on him early in life. He confessed he had never been able to stand his mother's caresses. His passion for those of his own sex appeared in adolescence. As a youth he had been so isolated that he had taken an inordinate interest in his own body. The only playmate he had had as a boy was a younger, idiotic brother. Interbreeding in the Wittelsbachs had produced a neurosis which made Ludwig sensitive to this influence. More, as a youngster, his father had instructed his tutors not to spare the whip, and it was his tutors' observation that instead of dreading, Ludwig had a relish for, chastisement.

Ludwig's education stressed art, music and architecture. He lived in a dreamland inhabited by characters from Wagner's operas, Greek fables and his favourite poets, a dreamland which Elizabeth first was to share with him, and towards which, later in life, she would sometimes show a predilection.

He was a lavish patron of the arts, but his insistence on being impresario ruined what might have been masterpieces. He spent huge fortunes, an expenditure under which the treasury groaned, on the construction of grotesque castles, to keep up his "game" of unreality.

He later would have as his guests for months at a time actors from the opera, who, while staying with him, were obliged to impersonate great personalities of history, his heroes and heroines, Louis XIV, Napoleon, Marie Antoinette and others.

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Elizabeth, Empress of Austria, dressed as "Leda" in a white Grecian gown, and Ludwig as "Lohengrin"

were sitting in a great panelled room in this bizarre castle on the Isle of Roses. Ludwig was explaining the game. He was only twenty; she was eight years older.

A stringed orchestra in a far salon was playing Elsa's song from *Lohengrin*. Their conversation sounds mad.

"*Lohengrin*—" she whispered.

"If you were mine, darling, I should be the happy *Lohengrin*," he whispered softly, his beloved Wagner's text coming easily to his lips—since long had he memorized all those scores. Dreamily he went on:

"*Lohengrin* seeks the woman who believes in him, who asks neither who he is nor whence he came, but who will love him as he is—because he is as he is. He seeks the woman to whom he will have no need to explain nor justify himself, but who will love him without reservation.

"What he is seeking is not admiration, but the one thing that can free him from his loneliness and satisfy his desires; love—to be loved—to be understood through love."

Leda reached for and pressed his hand.

"You know, *Lohengrin*, how close my own philosophy follows those lines."

He put his arms around her, kissed her gently on the brow and her hands.

"My darling!"

The Swan Knight.

* * * * *

Their little game over, they again reverted to the problems of real life.

"There are so many splendid and beautiful veins of life, Ludwig. I feel sometimes we both have lived too soon—too long before all these wonderful mysteries about us, above us, below us, have been solved—a solution I feel sure will brighten and enrich the whole world."

"A faster age," Ludwig amended. "For speed alone can enrich and fill life. Even in music the slow rhythm is enhanced by the majesty of the Allegro. The last time I visited Germany I rode in the cab of a railway locomotive on my return journey. I longed to feel the wind cutting my face, to feel the exhilaration of speed. It soothed and stimulated at the same time."

"Yes, dear, I have found solace in the speed of flight—trains—boats—on foot."

"It is that which is so wonderful in storms——"

"The Age of Speed—what an age that will be! Then there will be no avenues closed to flight—the great unexplored air will be conquered!"

They talked of balloons that would fly like birds, of music and voices spanning continents without a single wire to guide them—of the possibility of sound and vision being united—the television of a later day. They talked of control and direction of magnetic fluids in the human body. They discussed their experiments in mental telepathy. There had been times when Ludwig had sent a boat from the Isle of Roses to the shores of Starnberg Lake, where Elizabeth was wont to embark. This had often been done to the surprise and amazement of a special boatman who would find Her Majesty there—although no pennon had been waved, no rendezvous set, nor any outward signal executed. Small wonder that rumours of their madness was household stock and trade.

Sipping iced champagne they talked on like eager children. Much was happening in the world. At this very moment war was imminent—Germany against Austria.

Bismarck was eyeing Bavaria thoughtfully, a fifty-year-old Bismarck, battle-scarred from much portfolio campaigning. His reputation flaunted high over all Europe—as a diplomat, a builder of an Empire.

"If I were Franz Joseph," Ludwig said, "I'd make you my Ambassador to Bismarck. Your beauty and

your cleverness would go further than anything his whole Court could accomplish."

"Bismarck is a genius, they say, although I do not like him."

"I shouldn't like him even if he were a genius," Ludwig said. "He's nothing but a big Prussian policeman—people should be careful with policemen. We were dining together a short time ago in Munich. Bismarck came with King Wilhelm and he subordinated himself to me almost as much as he did to the Hohenzollern—the wearer of the Crown he serves."

"He probably thought the twenty-year-old King Ludwig would be putty in his iron hand," Elizabeth cut in.

"Quite probably, only he was wearing velvet gloves this time. I let him talk—made no comment—no statement—none whatever."

"Who would have thought you'd be so foxy."

"Not Bismarck, evidently," Ludwig chuckled.

"Bismarck may be a great man," Elizabeth said, "but the life-work of Ludwig II of Bavaria, his support of Wagner, his aid to worthy artists, the noble architecture that he had built under his directions—all these will last as a monument far greater than that to Chancellors with Iron Hands!"

Wagner! The name alone had a magical effect on Ludwig.

"Come with me—I have a portrait that will interest you—I want you to see it!"

Ludwig got to his feet impulsively. Elizabeth followed. He led her into the portrait gallery of his celebrated ancestors. He stopped before the new portrait of a small man with a big head, wearing a beret and a velvet jacket. Wagner! Ludwig's face was eager, excited.

"Thank God I have been able to help this man! Just think what he has already written! *Tristan*—

Rheingold — Walkyre — Meistersinger — Siegfried — Lohengrin—"

Ludwig broke off with emotion. Elizabeth stroked his hand sympathetically. The distant orchestra changed to *Meistersinger*.

She thought of the boy who since his coronation two years before had opened the kingly coffers to Wagner —built theatres for him—gave him courage and inspiration against the protest of the country. The Press spitefully dubbed Wagner "Lolas"—a take-off on a word that had stirred the kingdom in the previous generation. Lola Montez, a beautiful Spanish dancer, who had been the mistress of Ludwig's father, had ruined him, rumour said, by her extravagances and her wild escapades. On at least one notable occasion she had used the Kingly Sceptre as a riding-whip for her jaunt in the park.

The treasury officials had gone to extremes in expressing their disapproval of Ludwig's perversion of public funds. One unusually heavy levy Ludwig had ordered for Wagner, the sum of 40,000 gulden, they delivered in a public manner at the doorstep of Frau von Buelow, the daughter of Liszt—then married to a young musician who played a role as Wagner's friend, but who later would be married to Wagner.

But the criticism of the people left Ludwig undisturbed.

"I would give my life for Wagner," he said. "He is the God of my existence!"

Dinner was announced by a masked flunkey.

The private, oval-shaped dining-room had panelled walls set with medallions of Louis XIV, Queen Marie Antoinette and Napoleon I—all heroes of Ludwig's boyhood. The table was perfectly set. Candlelight glowed on crested silver, in glasses of fine wine. Orchids and roses made up the centrepiece.

Not a servant was in sight. "The adolescent German boy" sat down to eat with his guest, the Empress.

The first course was finished. Still no servant. The King pressed a button. The table disappeared from sight through a trap in the floor. Another table rose to take its place. On with the dinner. Wines blended with each course. Ice in Venetian goblets was blown into the shape of swans. After-dinner coffee was served in an adjoining room by another masked servant.

Here was luxury of appointment, meticulousness in detail. Here were rooms that might have been designed by a woman, by feminine hands—but they were Ludwig's designs.

Below specially designed windows was the Lake of Starnberg. Inside the shadows thickened—detail lost itself in twilight. The candlelight outlined a huge couch over which was thrown a cover of purple brocade into a corner of which was worked in gold Ludwig's crown and initials. Countless roses perfumed the room.

Elizabeth and Ludwig leaned against downy pillows in lazy comfort. Yet their spirits were restless, the two souls were not content. With faces pressed together they listened like children to the voices of the darkness.

"Little Dove," whispered Ludwig. "We two out of all this world—it would have been perfect—if only—"

"Never mind, dearest. We two out of all this world. Our dreams—they will be to us like strange melodies—deep in our hearts."

"And some day when you're free—you'll come to me—to the Mountain Eagle? He will wait and wait for you."

"Yes, L'Aiglon of my heart."

She passed her hand lightly over his forehead—

caressed his hair—fingered his delicate lobed ears—his eyelids. Ludwig kissed her fingers. Each one.

“ So like butterflies,” he said.

That there could be nothing real, lasting, about this liaison Elizabeth knew. Ludwig, a dweller in worlds unpopulated by human beings, was a citizen of the other world—of the land of Jeanne d’Arc—of dead poets, discarded thoughts, dead kings—of imagery too fragile and too beautiful to accept a worldly sun.

Hidden away on the Isle of Roses—momentary escape from the dark realities of life—yet sensing a nameless danger, they sat there past midnight. The orchestra played sleepily—softly from afar. With his arm supporting her shoulder the two floated away on billowy clouds of ecstasy—hopes and desires—melting in dreams.

A thick clinging mist rose to cover the Lake of Starnberg.

That was nature’s curtain.

CHAPTER IX

POLITICS AND LOVE

AMRS. ELIZABETH NICHOLSON CHAZALIE ARRIVED AT ONE of the *chic* hotels on the Place Vendôme, Paris, in late February 1866. The fidgety hotel clerk worked effusively to get the smartly attired patron properly quartered, to lodge her companion, Countess Festeties, a staff of four maid-servants, and two lively shepherd dogs.

Her salon must overlook the Place Vendôme. Orchids must be ordered. Madame Chazalie gave her orders in a short, peremptory tone. She turned, left the desk, disappeared around a monstrous pillar.

"Well, of all things," a loud voice called out. A portly gentleman with tipped ears, merry eyes, and iron grey hair that parted perfunctorily in the middle, clasped the stately figure in his arms.

"Sisi," he laughed, putting her down. "Where'd you get the idea to come here? And I was just thinking of you at this moment. Think of the devil, they say—"

"You surprised me too, Poppie! I'm so glad you're here!"

Duke Max eyed her quizzically.

"Mmm-mp!"

"Now what's the matter, Poppie?"

"Well, I must say you're a well-groomed woman!"

"You're looking pretty spry too, you old tease!"

"What's new in your world, Liebling?"

"Nothing much, just been dashing all over the place. Haven't been back to Vienna for a whole year

now. Old Sophie is still on guard in the children's nursery. I haven't anything else to do but wander."

"There's a Hungarian fête to-night, Sisi—and you like the Magyars. I was going to go—do you want to go along?"

"I'm incognito here," she reminded him. "I don't think I want to be discovered."

"Any—er—special reason?"

"No—but you never can tell."

"Come along anyway," persisted Max. "You can go back incognito to-morrow. Most of the people are friends of mine. I'd like to show you off to them."

"But, Poppie, it would be lots more fun for you and I to have dinner together and go to the theatre."

"Theatres are every night."

"Have it your own way."

"You *are* the best-looking woman in Europe," whistled Max in admiration, as Elizabeth came down the stairs to meet him, ready for the fête.

She was wearing the Austrian crown jewels. On her burnished brown hair wound in braids about her head a coronet of pearls, emeralds and diamonds glistened. A sable wrap slung across her marble-like shoulders, concealing partly a dainty creation in orchid-coloured chiffon velvet. A band of pearls encircled the high waist. Clusters of pearls adorned the flounces of a wide-trained skirt. Two tiny opal-coloured slippers with sparkling buckles peeped from beneath.

"Ravishing! You *will* give them a thrill to-night!" beamed Max.

"Poppie, it's a Hungarian fête—and I want to go as the Empress of Austria. I want them to see that at least this much of Austrian territory is friendly—that this part of Austria loves and admires them!"

The hostess was properly elated at the unannounced advent of Her Majesty, the Empress. Her party was doubly blessed. First the handsome, dashing Hungarian patriot, Count Julius Andrassy of Budapest, the guest of honour. And now an Empress!

She must bring these two together immediately in her home. She linked her arm in that of Andrassy.

"Come, my dear Count. I have a very interesting person for you to meet!"

He followed her obediently, a trifle bored. Life for a handsome and romantic nobleman in Paris had its drawbacks.

"Your Majesty," she began respectfully, "may I present Count Andrassy of Hungary."

Andrassy was a Magyar of the Magyars. A dash of the Oriental set off an aristocratic insouciance. He was gallant—could be extremely tender. He had the physical beauty of Magyar nobility at its best—a dark, flashing type of good looks for which the male and female members were justly famous. As a young liberal reformist he had played an important part in the Hungarian Revolution of 1848. He had been sent as Kossuth's ambassador to Constantinople. But as the tide turned against the Hungarian patriots what had been to him a great honour was interpreted in official Austrian language as an act of outright treason.

At the close of the War for Hungarian Independence, Franz Joseph celebrated his victory by signing death-warrants. The name of Julius Andrassy was among them. His property was confiscated. But the wary bird had flown—to France. In the elegant French society he had quickly won a place as a social lion. And using his personal charm for the cause he had won many friends for Hungary in France.

Clemency was finally granted and Andrassy returned to Hungary to become the trusted lieutenant of Francis Deak, the veteran leader of the Hungarian

liberation movement. He was visiting in Paris at the time.

Elizabeth took a glass of sparkling golden Tokay in her hand. She raised the wine high—a toast! All glasses were held high.

“To Hungary!”

The orchestra struck up the Racoci March as the glasses were drained amid enthusiastic cries.

Andrassy's eyes shone with admiration. The Empress was a friend of his people. After the toast was drunk the orchestra played a wild gypsy ballad. The guests began dancing.

“May I have the honour of the first dance?” asked Andrassy.

Elizabeth smiled, nodded her head. The music raced through his Hungarian heart. It was music of the blood and he gazed at the beautiful woman before him, his arms held her lightly. It was a “*coup d'foudre*.”

The night wore on. Andrassy stimulated her, evoked a different woman. She warmed to the fire of his personality. They became absorbed in each other. Guests remarked Andrassy's devotion and Elizabeth's increasing interest. Duke Max grinned wisely. Unmindful of those about them, they talked of “the Cause,” of its leader, Deak.

Francis Deak was descended from an ancient branch of Hungarian nobility. He achieved prominence in the revolutionary Diet of Hungary in 1848 when he became leader of the Liberal wing. Opposing Kossuth's radicalism he retired to private life in protest, drawing most of the Hungarian aristocracy with him. His attitude toward Franz Joseph had ever been conciliatory.

Now he stood as the symbol of old Hungarian rights as opposed to the bureaucratic government in Vienna and its absolutist, centralization policy. The time was

ripe for Hungary to throw off the yoke of Austrian police government. Andrassy had joined Deak in an effort to give Hungary home rule and dual status as a monarchy.

" You Magyars love your country, don't you? " Elizabeth said.

" Better than our lives."

" You are a great patriot, aren't you?—I admire you for it."

" Your Majesty is kind. But not the greatest patriot—Francis Deak, our idol—he is the greatest—the idol of all Magyars! "

Their conversation turned to the Vienna Court. Andrassy shared Elizabeth's antipathies on that subject.

" Your Majesty," he said, " it is quite possible that I will be present at the Vienna Court. I shall cherish the hope of seeing you again."

" It will be a pleasure for me too."

Elizabeth was in her bedroom, in her *négligé*—the luxuriant dark brown hair brushed carefully—as was customary—a hundred strokes on each side. It hung in shining strands over her shoulders—below her knees. Duke Max, in his bathrobe, sat submerged in an easy chair, smoking.

" What a real patriot Count Andrassy is," said Elizabeth.

" Yes, and incidentally, what a handsome chap."

" I'm not interested in that."

" Oh, no-o? "

" Certainly not, Poppie. But he's immensely interesting. He told me of the great sacrifices the Hungarians are making for their cause. It must be wonderful to feel really useful in the world."

" Since when, Sisi, did you get the idea that you're not useful? Why, a beauty like you would be useful

if she only sat upon a stool like Buddha and had people worship her!"

"Now you know what I mean—really useful. Serving a country, really serving. Count Andrassy affects me so. He made me want to help Hungary. He needs help so now. He and that wonderful Deak are having difficulties with Franz. I can understand that well enough!"

"Franz Joseph would be the last man in the world to appreciate your interest, little one."

"But Andrassy seems to want to work with the Emperor, within reasonable bounds. I wonder if I could help—"

"Did the Count put that idea in your head?"

"No-o—not exactly. But when he talked about Hungary I couldn't help but think of Italy—and you know how many concessions I got from Franz there."

CHAPTER X

NEW HOPES AND PROMISES

War . . . Prussia against Austria, and (on paper) the South German states. Hanover offered half-hearted support to Austria. Saxony alone fought gallantly to the last as Austria's ally. Austria went down to an ignoble defeat.

The Treaty of Prague literally kicked Austria out of Germany. Charlemagne's picture was turned to the wall. The Austrian King, by precedent the greatest of German princes, was decidedly no longer German. Venetia was returned to Italy. Bismarck had achieved his goal of Prussian supremacy. The "big Prussian policeman" had taken his stick and spanked the Hapsburgs soundly.

Franz Joseph was thirty-six years old. His last seven years as Emperor had been filled with disaster. The throne trembled, uneasy.

"Long live Maximilian!" came the cry from the streets.

Franz Joseph fingered his brother's "Act of Renunciation. . . ." Hardly a barrier to revolution. Maybe Mexico wasn't far enough distant? He sacked his advisers. He even accused his mother Sophie of having meddled to the disaster of the country. He paced his cell-like room.

There was thunder in the East too, and a revolt in Hungary would light a bomb under the Hofburg. Treason was rife among the Magyars. Something would have to be done about Hungary. For once he saw that Elizabeth had been right in her political argu-

ments, and his advisers, including Sophie, had been wrong. He needed her now. With her popularity, miracles might be performed. She would be valuable now, because she was popular with Hungarians. The Crown had need for popularity.

Her only condition for her return, when she left him, was that she, and not Sophie, would have charge of her children. After all, that would not be difficult.

Sophie would struggle, but this was no time for maternal considerations. She would have to leave the Hofburg. He would tell her that Imperial necessity required it. He would send her to a nice castle of her own.

"Sisi and I must start all over again," he muttered.

He wrote the Empress. Always considerate in his letters to Sisi, this letter almost achieved tenderness. At thirty-six, for the second time in his life, he acted against Sophie and his advisers, and for the same cause —to call Sisi to his side.

Elizabeth sat fingering His Majesty's note. "We both have much to forgive," read the lines. "I need you so much—the children need you."

That was a magic touch. And now the clinching argument. "Archduchess Sophie is leaving for Ischl."

Hofburg without Sophie? That would make it a real palace. And to have her children to herself, that would make it home.

The letter mentioned "Hungary." Her thoughts turned to Andrassy. Andrassy had wanted a compromise—a dual monarchy.

Crowds milled about the streets of Vienna, wild for joy. Their Empress was coming home again!

CHAPTER XI

AMBASSADRESS

A modern suffragette in full rig would have been a curiosity, a museum piece, to Elizabeth. She had no sympathy with mannish eccentricity in women. The way to handle men, she believed, was to be a thorough woman.

No mental red flannel petticoats—long drawers—or cotton stockings for Elizabeth. She armed herself with every feminine device for her adventures into diplomacy. She knew that her beauty was at its height. Male help was necessary. Hungarians were excessively chivalrous. The magnet of her charms must be depended on to draw their legions to her. To compete with men as a man was ridiculous. What was femininity made for?

On her diplomatic mission to Pest on July 9, 1866, she was an ambassadress *de luxe*. She played the game of political showmanship, of subtle statecraft, in a way that even Bismarck would admire.

She took with her two companions who would be certain to arouse popular approval, two actors for background on the setting of the Hungarian stage, her two children, Rudolf and Gazela.

Hungary, for a whole decade prior to Elizabeth's début as a statesman, had been kept in order by the belligerent fist of the Austrian State police. Franz Joseph was hated and despised in Hungary for it. A change was necessary.

Elizabeth's entry into Hungary was a "first-night" in the theatre of politics that had not had rehearsal.

Nor had it precedent. The audience was undecided whether to hiss or applaud the new-comer. Was this Empress still a friend?

Count Andrassy signalled courage and hope. His chief, Francis Deak, advanced to greet her.

"I should have felt it an act of meanness," Deak was later to explain, "had I turned my back upon the Empress at a bad time, when we had shown her so much respect before the dynasty was in difficulties."

The Hungarian press followed in the footsteps of Deak and Andrassy.

"With a lovely child on either side of her," they chanted, "Elizabeth is like a rose in full bloom!"

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If Elizabeth's *première* in Pest had brought down the Hungarian house, the House of Hapsburg created difficulties. The Emperor at first refused to receive a man he had once condemned to death—Julius Andrassy—who offered to come to Vienna with a plea of reconciliation.

Elizabeth persisted. This was no time for petty considerations. Conflict between the two countries was a reality.

Franz Joseph finally acquiesced.

Andrassy wrote in his diary: "It is certain that, if we succeed, Hungary will need to be more deeply grateful to the feminine providence that watches over her than most Hungarians realize."

During negotiations Elizabeth was tireless in her efforts to avoid a rupture. Twice relationships were severed. Each time the Empress "straightened out matters." She urged Franz Joseph for once in his life to see a situation clearly, urged him to lay aside his ingrained prejudices.

Andrassy's brilliance of intellect, his powers of persuasion; Deak's vision and personal strength in Hungary; Elizabeth's fine diplomacy and her popu-

larity on both sides of the border—all were factors on the side of a peaceful solution to the Hungarian question.

Franz Joseph finally “acted for the best ! ”

In January 1867 his Foreign Minister, the German Beust, signed a “Compromise” with Deak, head of the Hungarian delegation. The Austrian Empire was reformed into the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. With the exception of Army and Navy, foreign affairs, and administration of necessary revenues for those departments, each state became self-governing.

Meanwhile, a rumbling sound came out of the North.

The Czechs and Slavs objected. The Magyars had a separate state. Why should the Czechs and Slavs not have the same ?

But Elizabeth and Andrassy looked upon their work and found it good. His own hands were to place the Crown of Hungary upon her head. She was his Queen—and his love.

Historians may assign a minimum of petticoat influence to this epoch. But the decomposition of the Empire of Franz Joseph was postponed for more than half a century by the beauty, personal magnetism and tact of a forest maid.

“In February the Hungarian Constitution was restored,” writes Bagger. “On June 8, Franz Joseph and Elizabeth were crowned King and Queen of Hungary respectively. Dazzling Oriental splendour of nobles—furs, silks, velvets, jewels, aigrets . . . enthusiasm of populace . . . peal of bells. Wearing the crown of St. Stephen (several sizes too big for anybody) Franz Joseph rode on a white charger up Coronation Hill, and, swinging the sword of the realm to the North and South, East and West, swore to defend the Hungarian Constitution against all comers.”

There was no provision in the ancient Hungarian ceremony for a double coronation. But the Hungarian masses demanded an exception.

"Eljen Erjebet!" they shouted. "Long live Elizabeth!"

Count Andrassy placed the crown upon Her Majesty's head. The Hungarians were not unsympathetic to the romance. Their cheers dimmed the perfunctory rah-rahs given Franz Joseph. She was nearer to being a Hungarian than the Emperor suspected at the time.

It was truly an epochal day.

CHAPTER XII

THE CURSE

When Franz Joseph was made Emperor of Austria at the age of eighteen, he inaugurated his reign by the signing of death-warrants. Many Hungarian nobles, who had led a revolution, which was suppressed with the aid of Russian troops, were executed. Among those hung was Count Karolyi.

From the bitterness of her heart, his wife, Countess Karolyi, lifting her eyes to heaven, prayed a curse on the head of Franz Joseph:

"May Franz Joseph be smitten through those he loves best, in his children, and in all his kin."

That prayer would be answered. It was more a prophecy than a curse.

In the enthusiasm over the final solution of the Hungarian question, Franz Joseph, the Court, the Austrians, even the Hungarians, forgot. But the gods remembered. As if to show that Franz Joseph's effort at atonement for his sins could not wipe out the past, they refused to wait until the celebration of Austro-Hungarian unity was over. Ten days after the coronation at Pest they struck their first blow.

It was June 19, 1867, when Emperor Maximilian of Mexico was shot by a firing squad in the little Mexican city of Queretaro.

A three-day reprieve, appeals for clemency coming from all parts of Mexico, the United States, the world, and two opportunities for escape—all had failed in averting the tragedy. Even Garibaldi, the Italian liberator, had appealed to President Juarez to free

Maximilian. All was in vain. The Hapsburger had to die.

Napoleon III was unable to aid his ally.

Franz Joseph, through his ministers, pleaded for the United States—now victorious over the Confederacy—to act. He had forsaken his brother.

Charlotte, her mind broken after her unsuccessful mission to Napoleon III and the Pope seeking earlier aid, was in an asylum.

Maximilian, whatever one might say against his foolhardiness, died like a man, a good soldier.

"All I ask is that you aim straight at my heart," he said to the firing squad, each member of which he presented with an ounce of gold.

Three years of suffering and humiliation, tragic error and treachery, this was the swan song for the dreamer of Miramar.

Maximilian's death was a shock to Elizabeth. She felt that he had been lured into an impractical scheme by people who had axes to grind. He was a martyr to the Imperial ambitions of Napoleon III, the jealousy of Franz Joseph, the political ambitions of his wife, Charlotte, who wanted nothing more than the title "Empress."

But sorrow for his brother's tragic death did not cause Franz Joseph to cancel a party in honour of his thirty-seventh birthday two months later in Salzburg. His guests of honour were Napoleon III and Empress Eugenie, betrayers of his brother.

Napoleon and Franz Joseph discussed the death of Maximilian in an impersonal way. Maximilian had made mistakes. . . . He should have escaped when he had the chance. He might have done this, or that. . . . Elizabeth's long-suffering control snapped.

"At least Maximilian was a man . . . that is more than I can say for those who will some day have to answer before God for his death."

The Frenchman fidgeted uncomfortably in his chair. He was suffering from bladder trouble and his doctors had warned him against undue excitement.

If Franz Joseph's conscience hurt, he made no sign . . . except he later explained to Napoleon that Elizabeth was in a delicate condition.

It is notable that neither Franz Joseph nor Napoleon gave any sign that they thought Elizabeth referred to the Mexicans as those responsible for Maximilian's execution.

Elizabeth, in spite of her ill-concealed dislike and contempt for Napoleon, remained friends with Eugenie during the whole course of her life.

Eugenie wrote of Elizabeth in her diary on this occasion, "Elizabeth has the qualities of spirit and soul better suited to a French woman than to a German."

During their Salzburg stay they were much together. Never had it been able to record a friendship between two such beautiful Empresses.

The coronation of Franz Joseph and Elizabeth as King and Queen of Hungary added new responsibilities to the throne. The delicate health of Rudolf made it incumbent to have another heir. On April 22, 1868, Empress Elizabeth gave birth to a baby girl. She was christened Valerie.

The very christening of this baby revealed the newly-found independence of Elizabeth at the Hofburg. Heretofore she had never been consulted as to the names of her offspring. This time she had everything to do about it, and chose a name which she thought euphonious.

For the first time she was able to enjoy motherhood. With no Sophie around to scold and advise, her starved heart was not to be denied. She was happy with Valerie in her arms, to hug, to kiss, to feed, to play with.

The birth of Valerie marked a new epoch in her life. She had done her duty to the nation as a breeder of heirs; she had done her duty to Franz Joseph as a wife; she had accomplished her work as an Ambassador.

Gracefully, proudly, she stepped off the platform of government, of politics, for ever.

Supreme in her life from now on would be the business of being a woman.

CHAPTER XIII

EXOTIC MADONNA

Elizabeth was in the morning-room of the Imperial summer residence at Ischl. In the role of a mother—she was wearing a *négligé* of white Indian silk clinging to her lithe form.

Instead of the magnificent and beflounced styles of the time, she originated one that was nothing short of scandalous—she wore no petticoats.

Her hair fell about her shoulders in chestnut glory. Her eyes, inscrutable, adapted themselves to her amber necklace. They were baffling eyes—few were able to tell whether they were blue, brown or grey.

Resting snugly on her arm, a naked, golden-haired baby girl of three years was lisping English. She poked her mother's face with chubby fists. Elizabeth captured the fists in her hands and kissed them. Little Valerie was at the height of her rule of babyhood.

A comfortable-looking English woman, Mrs. Throckmorton, entered the room, holding a robe for the child. Elizabeth greeted her.

"Nurse, Mutzerl has had a lovely sunbath and now she's ready for her dinner—then the sandman."

Mutzerl, well behaved despite complaints of Sophie that she would be ruined by mothering, went with the nurse without fussing.

It was a lazy day out there in the country. Elizabeth was, as she said, having a grand time "being domestic—after her fashion." She seated herself at the spinet and improvised. She hummed a Hungarian gypsy lullaby. A tiny noise attracted her.

Rudolf and Gazela had been listening without her knowing it. Gazela was sixteen. Rudolf was fourteen. Rudolf, at the awkward age, sensitive, but quite emotional, went to the spinet.

"Mama," he said, "when I look at you so beautiful—like an angel when you sing—you make me want to be good!"

Elizabeth responded with a hug.

"You are good, darling," she answered.

"Well, lots of people don't think so."

"Rudi, I want you to be—and to remain—absolutely indifferent to what people think of you. Otherwise you can never be happy. As long as you are *good* in your own heart—according to your own conscience—that is all that matters."

Franz Joseph, Sophie, the Court—possibly the nation itself—would have trembled had they listened to the advice Elizabeth was giving the Crown Prince. It was a homely scene. Gazela was curled up in a corner reading a book. Her eyes were close together, she was undersized, her mouth petulant. Not a pretty child.

A St. Bernard plumped down beside Elizabeth—eyed her expectantly, then sank his great head to the floor as she stroked its silky coat. Rudi flung himself down full length on a white bearskin at his mother's feet, his head on his arms.

As his mother looked at him lying on the floor she remarked the tautness of his body. Elizabeth had interested him in athletics, in horsemanship; had taught him calisthenics. She regarded physical culture as vital to the well-being of herself and her children. Without health there could be no happiness in her opinion.

Physically Rudolf was a perfect specimen. But there was much difference of opinion in regard to his mental equipment and education.

"Young Rudolf is extremely difficult to manage,"

his grandmother Sophie had continually lamented. Well, Sophie would have no control over him—that was self-evident. He was showing unusually rebellious and unorthodox tendencies. He had a fiery temper.

Sophie had been away from the steering-wheel for four years, and the course of domestic life ran smooth enough for Elizabeth. Sophie's visits were frequent, it was true. She was treated with what she considered her due respect—given the place at the head of the table, bowed to and cajoled—as His Majesty desired. But her influence was negative. The children frankly disliked her. Sophie often referred to Rudolf's "Wittelsbachian naughtiness," his flair for originality which she regarded as both dangerous and improper.

Elizabeth, on the other hand, took a great delight in Rudolf's curiosity, imagination and originality. Instead of suppressing these tendencies, as would have been proper in the education of her son, she encouraged them. She never realized that these qualities were dangerous for a Crown Prince . . . that they one day would prove fatal to him.

Rudolf was a rebel at heart . . . but that didn't prevent Elizabeth from adding spark to the flame. Rudolf objected to learning German. Elizabeth had never liked the discipline, the inelasticity, the harshness of the German language herself . . . so she urged his tutor, Count Latour, to make his education as un-German as possible. The Count was French so this idea seemed plausible . . . but even the Count had to object to Rudolf's so-called liberalism, his stubbornness of wanting to think things out for himself. When the Count protested these tendencies to Franz Joseph, he little realized that his *protégé* was doing just exactly what his mother had taught him to do. But Franz Joseph was shocked. One day he came into the sun-room of the Ischl palace. He was excited.

"What is it, Franz?" Elizabeth asked.

"I have some letters here—some letters Rudolf wrote his tutor. They distress me deeply."

He handed them to her. "His Highness," it read, "attempts to escape from everything he finds unpleasant." Other extracts were: "My head is quite dizzy. My brain seems to turn around and never stops. No sooner one thing goes out of it than another comes in. Everyone tells me something different. I keep on thinking 'what will the end be?' Are we something above animals, or are we just animals? I think we are animals. Then, do we descend from apes, or have men always existed as well as apes? The priests, so far as I can see, have suffered most from the fact that they have understood so well how to make the people humble and abject by superstition and piety, that, like the aristocrats, things have been so easy for them they have been able to do as they liked with the poor people. If I am not mistaken Royalty has lost its power. It is a mighty ruin, which goes on from day to day, but must go under at last. As long as the people let themselves be blindly led, all is well; but now it is different, men are free and ruin will come down with the next storm."

All this from a fourteen-year-old boy!

Elizabeth's heart swelled with pride. But Franz Joseph stormed.

"This is no time for ridiculous pampering, Sisi," he ranted. "Rudolf, you must remember, is the Crown Prince! He is heir to the throne—and look at him already with this liberal tomfoolery!"

Franz Joseph's lecture went off in a cloud of platitudes, and then—henceforth the Crown Prince would be managed directly by His Majesty, the Emperor. No one else was to meddle with his education. From this date Franz Joseph would be "Your Majesty" to Rudolf; his superior officer.

The Emperor left in a sullen rage for Schoenbrunn.

Small satisfaction he'd gotten from the Empress—she'd ignored him.

Elizabeth went into the baby's nursery. Mutzerl, from baby days to maturity, was to remain her mother's pet. She lay in a little white bed inlaid with mother-of-pearl Cairene work.

Valerie wore quaint little white dresses with sashes of mauve. The ribboned bows of her wee panties were of the same colour. Elizabeth ignored Sophie's advice that the proper colour for a child was pale blue, pale pink or green. Elizabeth wasn't bothered. Valerie was her baby. Violet was a nice colour and that was what Valerie wore.

In the rosy light of the shaded night lamp, Elizabeth bent over the pretty little head, touched the tousled curls.

"Mine—all my own, Mutzerl," she crooned softly. "They are determined to destroy your poor brother, but their fangs will never poison your sweet little mind."

Elizabeth had taken into her service a little Hanitic boy called Mahmoud, who had accompanied the Egyptian Government Mission to Austria the previous year. The black boy had acted as page of the Cairene house which Khedive Ismail had erected in the Prater. The Khedive, noting Elizabeth's amusement with the "nigger doll," had made her a present of Mahmoud. She took the little darky under her wing, with all the gentleness and affection that she was wont to lavish on her own children. It made the Archduchess Sophie, in her own words, "sick."

Mahmoud had big rolling eyes, a shining black skin, and wore dazzling colours with startling effect.

"He looks like one of Barbedienne's enamelled bronzes," Elizabeth exclaimed with delight.

A severe winter in Vienna had been too much for him; he contracted pneumonia. Thanks to Elizabeth, who nursed him patiently, he was saved from death.

Mahmoud's affection for Elizabeth was intensely primitive, and he developed a violent case of jealousy when Elizabeth so much as made a fuss over her dogs.

Elizabeth played directly in the face of public criticism in regard to her democratic affections for Mahmoud. As a joke she had the coal-black boy photographed with the lily-white Valerie, labelling the picture, "Playmate of Archduchess Valerie." She further flaunted the black boy in the face of the Court. Instead of the usual Empress's Christmas greeting, she sent this picture out as a Christmas card.

Even Duke Max couldn't have surpassed Elizabeth in democratic fraternisation during those days in the Ischl castle.

She would applaud the dignified Mrs. Throckmorton as she emulated the antics of a dancing dervish for Valerie's delight, or Mahmoud's skill in making bouquets of the flowers Gazela had picked.

At times she and Rudi guided their horses through the tall grasses while they sang Hungarian gypsy songs which she taught him.

Happy days—these few years for them. Sophie summed it all up more accurately than she knew.

"No one on God's earth," she declared, "ever heard of such a mother!"

CHAPTER XIV

THE TRAIL OF THE BAVARIAN PINE

1892. It was to be a family Christmas. All of the members of the House of Hapsburg and branches by marriage, mistake or manipulation were to be present three days before. The Hofburg square was knee-deep in snow. Flunkeys got out their shovels and scooped away at it merrily.

This reunion idea was Elizabeth's. Relatives began pouring in. It promised to be a real old home week. Present would be Ludoveca and her seven other children. They with their offspring.

Duke Max alone was lacking. What kind of a party was this going to be with her father missing? The telegraph wires to Possenhofen began to burn.

"Why aren't you here, Poppie?"

"Can't come. Can't leave the dogs alone for Christmas."

"Bring those dogs with you—they can have a holiday in the Hofburg too."

"Taking next train."

Duke Max hied himself to the station. He was sixty-three years old, but the embodiment of health and heartiness.

Five splendid dogs followed their master proudly. They knew their master. They were his autumn children. He busied himself at the ticket booth.

"What? No dogs first class? Well, what about second class? No dogs? Well, where the hell? The

baggage car? What do you think these dogs are—carpet bags? Third class? Then give me a ticket for one man and five dogs, third class. Why didn't you say so in the first place?"

Tripping over leashes, each dog had a different idea about how to get on a train—Duke Max finally got himself into a third class compartment. Whew! Thank God he was leaving his horses home! Five dogs in one pull was worse than the colt he had broken in a few months ago!

"Here, Puck—sit down and get that blankety-blank tail out of my face! Pardon me, mein Herr!" he addressed the other occupant of the compartment. "These dogs only have good manners when they have a ten-acre field to have 'em in."

"That's all right—I like dogs," spoke up the genial stranger—whose belly bespoke intimate acquaintance with beer barrels—whose nose carried out a consistent scheme of exterior decoration.

"Well, it's a good thing you do. Five pups with the ginger of this bunch are enough to wear out a lot of affection once they get shut up in this chicken coop."

He shifted on the hard knotty boards that were known as seats. Taking out a flask bearing the stains of much use he handed it over to the other human occupant.

"Have a swig—it'll prepare you for your wife when she sees all that congregation of dog hair on you."

"Thank you."

So—oo-oop—gurgle-gurgle-gurgle, the contents found a home.

Duke Max wiped off the neck of his vest and applied himself industriously to the "schnapps."

The two men became friendly. It was not long before they felt like brothers. The train jogged along agreeably. The dogs, the first excitement of departure worn off, searched out friendly smelling corners and dozed.

"What's your business?" asked Max.

"I'm a watchmaker in Vienna," the genial one replied, puffing a bit with pride. "And a good one too, if I do say it myself!"

"What do you think of this watch then?" Max pushed a mammoth stem-winder at him. "I've carried it ever since I was a cavalry officer as a young sprout."

The watchmaker squinted at it professionally.

"It's a good one—but you must come around and see mine. I've got some you only have to wind once a week. By the way—what's your line, anyway?"

"Now, just to look at me, what do you think?"

"Well, if you didn't steal the dogs, I'd say you were a kennel keeper."

"Nope, you're wrong, both times," Max continued.

"I have no profession. Just going down to Vienna for a Christmas spree at the home of my son-in-law."

"Ach so—your son-in-law is in business in Vienna?"

"Yes, and again—no."

"Do you mean he just loaf?"

"Now it's according to how you look at it. Most people think he's a pretty industrious fellow."

"The poor fellow has no regular job?"

"Well, it did look like it wasn't going to be regular for a while—but it looks as if it will last for some time now."

"Just what is his job anyway?"

"Oh, he's nothing but an Emperor!" Duke Max laughed loudly.

The watchmaker joined him.

Not for nothing had his Gretl told him fondly that he had a great sense of humour. He related it to the conductor, and to the tune of the last few sweet drops they laughed heartily. The dogs woke up and wagged their tails politely. *Gemeutlich.*

Poking Max in the ribs, the watchmaker entered into the spirit of the comedy.

"Say, you must introduce me to that boy of yours some day! I'd like to meet him."

"Sure thing," agreed Max.

"I'll wear my best Sunday clothes."

"Great! And bring Frau Gretl with you."

Max took down the watchmaker's address.

"Drop round at the palace to-morrow afternoon."

The watchmaker blinked—almost credulous.

"Oh, sure," he swaggered bluffly. "Have His Majesty ready for me."

Vienna. The new friends shook hands.

"Auf wiedersehen."

The watchmaker scratched his head perplexedly. The dogs and Duke Max disappeared around the corner.

Busily, happily, Elizabeth directed the major details of the coming Christmas fête. Glowing with health and vitality, her charm was at its height. She was thirty-five. Although she had been beautiful for long years before this time—and was to remain so for years after—thirty-five marked her beauty's peak. Diet, exercise, clean living—these had conspired to keep her body slim and lithe—slender as a girl of eighteen.

Christmas was a time of generosity for her. She never forgot a single one of her multitude of friends. She heard of the need of Heine's family. That discovery meant for them costly, practical presents. Bubi and Madi, the beloved companions of her childhood, and the rest of the long list of Duke Max's love children—all these profited by Sisi's munificence. To her own brothers and sisters she was no less kind.

Her brother Ludwig had married the actress Henrietta Mendel—a match she and Max alone approved. It had been a happy, albeit penniless, match, Elizabeth was not unmindful of the sacrifice her brother had made when he chose love instead of wealth and

position. On Marie, Ludwig's fourteen-year-old daughter, Elizabeth showered presents and jewels and had some of her prettiest frocks cut down to fit her.

Marie was at the Christmas party.

Elizabeth's admiration of Marie began with the little girl's exhibition of splendid horsemanship. She rode with Elizabeth in the Prater. Later, when the little Bavarian schoolgirl was back home after her fling as a "glittering princess," she received a short message. It read: "I give you Mary, the little mare you rode at Vienna on your last visit. She arrives by next train, and she is all your own. Aunt Elizabeth."

The Empress entered into the holiday spirit. Valerie, now four years old, was hostess to hundreds of Vienna's poor at a Christmas Tree Party in the Hofburg on December 23.

One of Elizabeth's charitable acts was an enduring blessing for Vienna. She established the "Volkskuechen" or "People's Kitchen"—fifteen small restaurants scattered over different parts of the city where good food could be had at ridiculously low prices. Elizabeth presided over them until they had got well started. She interested some of the nobility in the project—leaving them to carry on the work. The State, recognizing their worth, established new kitchens—perpetuating the ideas of the Empress. Fifty years after her efforts they were to exist as large, cheerful restaurant rooms, with fresh air and scrupulously clean tables, down to the present day.

Good soup, meat, vegetables—at cost. They are known to-day as "Wok."

Franz Joseph had a good sense of the ridiculous. He enjoyed a practical joke—providing of course that he was not its victim.

When Duke Max arrived with his dogs and related his experience, and told of his invitation to the watch-

maker, the Emperor was delighted. His experience in Hungary, Italy, and the democratic sympathies of Elizabeth and Duke Max, were influencing him towards the belief that the people were not so bad. He agreed the watchmaker must be called.

Frau Gretl helped a thoroughly frightened Wiener with a fat belly and a red nose into his muffler and ear muffs. A summons from the Emperor!

"Don't forget to make a nice bow," admonished Gretl. "Maybe His Majesty has seen one of your watches."

He made for the Hofburg and presented his note. He was admitted to the Presence. Duke Max greeted him and introduced him to the Emperor, who looked milder than usual. The watchmaker looked from one to the other in consternation.

"Himmel, vas?"

His eyes popped. A father-in-law of the Emperor riding third class, playing valet to hounds? What sort of a world was this anyhow?

Duke Max poured a glass of brandy and put the watchmaker at his ease.

"You see," Franz Joseph smiled, "my position is rather unique—and as the Duke told you it keeps me rather busy."

"I'm the only one that has no job in my family!" Duke Max explained.

"And what do you think, Gretl?" said an immensely puffed watchmaker, relating his story to an admiring wife, "His Majesty ordered a dozen watches, and we can put on the shop window, in bright gold letters, 'Watchmaker to His Majesty the Emperor.'"

"Oh, Oscar," sighed Frau Gretl beatifically, "you are made—we shall always be somebody!"

It was Christmas Eve. Little Valerie's tree was lighted. Children and grown-ups received their presents, as arranged by Elizabeth. Valerie was bundled off to bed.

The guests sat waiting for dinner to be served in the huge banquet hall. A servant in livery announced dinner.

Duke Max was seated next to Archduchess Sophie, the only one who was not happy. The party was too undignified.

Rudolf was making a lot of noise . . . Gazela was talking excitedly. . . . Round and round the table the food went—disappearing as if by magic. Plum pudding from Merry Old England. It came to the table in flaming rum! Champagne . . . very dry. . . . Iced to perfection. Max mixed it liberally with his beer. Coffee time came. The youngsters went to bed. The elders sat about talking.

Both Franz Joseph and Max, having imbibed freely, hit it off amazingly well. They sang folk-songs together—sat up talking until long after the rest had retired. Max got confidential. He laid a soothing hand upon His Majesty's shoulder.

" You wouldn't have been such a bad fellow, Franzi," he consoled him tipsily, " if it hadn't been for your Mama ! "

" Bur-rrr-rp ! " he belched.

Only Duke Max could get such a trill on the " r " !

C H A P T E R X V

BRIGHT MOURNING

Sophie died in 1875 at the age of seventy. The exit of this dominant character was everything that she herself would have wished.

Her soul was ushered out by the Cardinal, who administered the last rites. There had never been any doubt in Sophie's mind that the portals of heaven would open wide for her. Special prayers were said in the various churches throughout the kingdom, in the very Vatican itself. With all the pomp and ceremony that the Church and the Monarchy could devise she was laid to rest in the Capuchin vault beside the body of her husband and near that of her youthful lover, L'Aiglon, the son of Napoleon Bonaparte.

Sophie had lived the good life. With the exception of a romantic, colourful indiscretion with L'Aiglon, one looks in vain to find a blemish in her character. Viewed according to her own estimate, she was perfect. She had been everything that a wife, a Queen-Mother, a mother-in-law should be! The stern dictates of duty had guided her throughout in all her private and public acts. She was as cold-blooded as a precept; as inexorable as a law; once she had drawn the deep line between what was right and wrong, she never once deviated from her path of righteousness. In a make-up of this character, human kindness was a weakness; laughter, gaiety of any kind, was frowned upon as folly. Her scheme of things made no room for innovations, or new inventions. An inquiring mind was anathema to faith, either religious or political. Greco, whose

religious pictures revealed humanity suffering for its sins, was her favourite artist. Her philosophy of life, art, music and literature was as stiff as the corsets she wore.

It might be possible to respect, even admire, a character of this kind; but few people could, or did, love Sophie.

And it is not an exaggeration to say that Elizabeth despised her. Nor is there any indication that Elizabeth ever did realize that Sophie was working according to her lights, for her religion, the Hapsburgs, for the "best" interests of Elizabeth herself. To Elizabeth she became a phobia, representing restraint, rules, convention, boredom, cruelty—in fact, an embodiment of everything Elizabeth detested.

Her death was celebrated rather than mourned. Franz Joseph grieved, but did not appear to miss her long.

Elizabeth, on the ground that mourning for Sophie would be hypocrisy, chose the year of her death to fulfil her childhood ambition—to become "Queen of the circus."

She had once shocked Sophie when she invited a well-known circus queen to the Hofburg. Now she was to become one herself. To the horror of the Court and the entertainment of a chosen few, she operated a one-ring circus of her own. Dressed as a handsome boy in close-fitting black satin knickers, a white silken shirt, gossamer black stockings, patent leather pumps—she leaped through hoops from a standing balance on the backs of galloping horses like any skilled queen of the big tops. Duke Max, as usual, was all in favour of Elizabeth's conduct. On special occasions, he even acted as master of ceremonies. He was no mean performer himself, for all his years.

The circus was built after Elizabeth's design, and adjoined the Royal stables. She had it lined with mirrors, her initial and crown appeared over the doors.

Around the circle were comfortably upholstered jade-green velvet seats. It was a rare and exciting toy ! So pleased was the Empress with this circus of hers in Vienna, she proceeded to build another at Possenhofen for Duke Max. She presented it to him with some of the finest animals to be found in the world. Here Sisi herself performed on numerous occasions. The audience was a bit different than that in Vienna—members of Duke Max's illegitimate ranks headed the list.

Franz Joseph never ceased protesting against these "scandalous" affairs. He never permitted the newspapers to print a line concerning the performances. In fact, fifty years later it was to be next to the impossible to purchase a picture of Elizabeth on horseback. Even Duke Max's pictures were unavailable in Austria. They had been destroyed by the police !

Max laughed at the efforts of Franz Joseph to keep this a secret.

" Those fellows," he declared, " will have a terrible time whitewashing the Wittelsbachs. I certainly wouldn't want their job ! "

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After the birth of Valerie, Franz Joseph and Elizabeth had again decided to go their separate ways. Although they never achieved love, they had become friendly, so friendly indeed that she would arrange for his comfort and he gave her a dispensation and protected her against the consequences of her indiscretions.

Their correspondence was amazingly friendly and frank. It was just as well that Elizabeth was frank as her movements were constantly reported to the Emperor, no matter how slight and unimportant they might seem. She was followed and guarded throughout her life by secret service agents, so skilled

and unobtrusive in their work that they rarely annoyed her.

In his letters and telegrams to Elizabeth the Emperor called her either "Sisi" or "Mama." She addressed him as "Franz," sometimes (when discussing the children) as "Papa." Each was solicitous of the other's health; they frequently wrote about the health of the children. They signed their letters with assurance of affection.

Many of these letters and telegrams are in the archives to-day. Not to be found in the archives are those letters from Sisi narrating some escapade of an intimate nature, or those from the Emperor warning the Empress to be more discreet.

Elizabeth kept a diary throughout her life in which she detailed her most intimate thoughts and acts. According to close friends of the Empress who have seen parts of this priceless record, she wrote her observations in many languages—French, Hungarian, German and sometimes Greek. Often the diary was illustrated by quaint sketches. But these records were destroyed by the Emperor's secret police at his orders, after Elizabeth's death. What a treasure to biographical history lost! Undoubtedly, they would have shocked a Victorian people. Even the minute police records of Elizabeth's conduct—she was kept under constant surveillance, no keyhole that did not have its prying eye—all these stereotyped notes were destroyed. Elizabeth's literary efforts—a number of poems and fantastic fables—met the same end. It was in this way that Franz Joseph, absolute Emperor, attempted to wipe out the past.

In justification to Franz Joseph, he did not attempt to impose upon Elizabeth the double standard. He himself lived in a glass house. If Elizabeth had lovers, he had loves, and many more of them. As a dashing

middle-aged man, he was even more popular with the ladies than in the days of his youth. There was something about those mutton-chop whiskers that was irresistible.

The Court ladies of Europe wrote him love-notes. Austrian monarchists of to-day treasure maudlin letters written as proof of the charms of Franz Joseph.

"Our delicious Emperor—our adorable Emperor," he is called. "You cannot imagine what a simply delightful dancer he is—I have danced the cotillion with him and never have I known such bliss!" Others raved about his conversational powers. "Such a divinely interesting person to talk to, my dear—with such a heavenly, manly voice."

Women fell over each other to get near him. An affair with the Emperor was an honour to brag about even in the Court circles. The men aped his way of dressing, of walking, of standing. They aped his moustache and his mutton-chop whiskers.

Franz Joseph's "weakness" was not restricted to noble ladies of the Court. He became the clandestine cavalier of many a music-hall artist. Occasionally he selected one from the Court theatre or the opera. To the last he held out for the Kremsier Venus type of woman.

There was some criticism—but not much. The King could do no wrong. It was quite evident to the people that His Majesty must seek elsewhere what was denied him at home.

So Franz Joseph went his way and Elizabeth hers—under the supervision of His Majesty's spies. But Elizabeth didn't allow them to interfere with her plans.

She travelled with a complete retinue. In addition to her staff of servants and her favourite dogs, she had two cows accompany her on her journeys! "Putsie"

and "Daisy" (the cows) came of a distinctly aristocratic bovine house of France. Elizabeth had bought them somewhere near Aix-les-Bains and believed that their milk had a certain special quality, highly beneficial to her. So for years, wherever Elizabeth went, there went Putsie and Daisy. Like right Royal cows, they were provided with their own attendant, who kept their skin in delectable condition with brushing and cleaning and daily relieved them of their precious milk! In the Austrian State archives traces of their ambles are recorded. Councillor Kaula wrote in his account book of Her Majesty the Empress's expenditures, the following:

"For two cows bought in Aix-les-Bains, and their travelling expenses with the Empress to the account of the Foreign Office and Privy Purse; Francs 1473.53 or florins 707 and Kronen 57."

There were days when Elizabeth lived on nothing but milk. She frequently bathed her face and shoulders in cream. She was a fanatic on both diet and physical culture. Daily, she recorded her weight.

Not without effort did Elizabeth keep her girlish figure. She ordered a gymnasium fitted up for her on top of the Royal villa in Ischl—another in the garden. On her journeys she carried her trapeze, rope ladders, stretching machines, parallel bars, fencing mats—the whole paraphernalia of exercise. Every day a feminine form dressed in black satin bloomers and white silk jersey could be seen making for the training quarters where a permanently employed trainer would give instructions. Wherever possible she would begin the day with a smart gallop on a spirited horse.

All these efforts did not go unrewarded. Until her death Elizabeth never lost the figure nor contour of youth.

Within a year of Sophie's death, Gazela, at twenty years of age, married a German Prince, Leopold of

Bavaria, a tall, handsome youth. The inbreeding of the Hapsburgs and Wittelsbachs continued. Elizabeth, now celebrated as the most beautiful woman in Europe, did nothing to aid or hinder her daughter's marriage. It was a love affair, which pleased Elizabeth; he was sufficiently important to obtain Franz Joseph's consent.

Rudolf, now seventeen, was being groomed, through rigorous discipline, for his responsibilities as the Crown Prince.

Valerie, now seven, was being taught her lessons by more liberal teachers chosen by Elizabeth.

More than ever, the show and pretence of the Hofburg bored the Empress, who proceeded to escape on her new yacht, *The Miramar*, named in memory of Maximilian. After that, she visited the Isle of Roses, where she worried at the state of King Ludwig's health. His madness could no longer be concealed.

Then to Biedersteiner Palace in the *Englischer Garten* in Munich to visit her family. There Elizabeth and Duke Max went as they always did, to the *Hofbrau-house*. They drank, as of old, the dark fragrant beer from litre tankards. Both were unusually serious.

Duke's Max's insuppressibility, his buoyancy, were momentarily silenced. They were talking of Ludwig, King Ludwig of Bavaria.

"Poor Ludwig," Max said. "He's brilliant one moment, and the next he's just insane."

"I'm worried, Poppie. He was my truly æsthetic love. We understood each other perfectly."

Duke Max sighed—gently patted her face.

"You know, Poppie, I can only feel comfortable where civilization has not crushed or destroyed that which is natural. I feel cramped, clammy—sticky—at a Court ball. Yet at Cairo, with all the noise of porters, donkeys, bazaars, I feel fresh, free! Almost as happy as I do in the forest. I suppose I'm outside

the pale again so far as the Court is concerned. But I'm on the wing—I must keep moving."

" Well, Sisi, you come by your love of travel naturally. I've had a great life myself. I'll never forget the thrill I had out in the desert one time with good old Petzmacher! We got a bit home-sick out in all the cool, mysterious air—so still and creepy. So we began to play some Bavarian folk songs. Petzmacher was working the violin and I the zither. And do you know, the first thing we knew there was a whole ring of Bedouins squatting around us and grinning like troopers. Believe me those were the days!"

The lighter vein—and long draughts of that beautiful mahogany liquid—was raising them out of the depression. Father and daughter were happy to be together again.

CHAPTER XVI

INDIAN SUMMER

The call of the hunt—to Ireland! Once more the wanderlust had Elizabeth in its grasp. Ireland, “Summerhill,” in the County Meath. Incognito, as the Countess Hohenembs, she rented Lord Langford’s rambling country mansion. With her was her sister, Mathilde the Countess of Trani, disguised as plain “Fraulein Nelly Schmidt.” Then a long retinue: two ladies-in-waiting, a doctor, a Swedish masseuse (“The woman is built like a gladiator,” raved Ludo-veca. “I can’t understand how Sisi can bear to have her touch her!”), Fanny the hairdresser, a personal maid, a battalion of general servants, two Great Dane dogs, Putzie and Daisy the cows—and there was also Mizzie, an aristocratic goat of Maltese stock.

Elizabeth often supervised Mizzie’s milking and she believed it had great curative powers. Thanks to the manipulations of the attendant of the prize cows, Mizzie was deprived of her natural perfume by daily brushing and powdering.

Fifty-two horses—many of which had been bought in Ireland—ended up the list. Elizabeth’s favourite horses were the magnificent Irish hunters Boy, Jupiter, Domino, St. Patrick, Doctor, Investment, Beauclerc, Lorraine, Othello and Black Prince.

The master of ceremonies for the Irish season was a Captain William Middleton who was called “Bay,” his colouring giving him the nickname. Bay was a brawny Scotsman; while not exactly handsome by the current standards, was reputed to have a way with

the ladies, more so than any man in Scotland or Ireland—a lavish tribute! He was popular with men too, for his nerve and dash.

At their first meeting Elizabeth liked him. In his early thirties—vigorous and humorous, sun-bronzed hair, russet-coloured eyes. He was the kind of man that women take seriously and other men make into legends. Elizabeth was pleased from the start that he had been hired as one of her retinue.

The Empress's friends in her Irish adventures were many and noted—Reynell, the planter of the heather of County Meath, Lord Spencer, Lord Randolph Churchill, General Brooks, a Mr. Plunkett, Henry Brooks.

These were active days! They rode far and away—over the vast moors of County Meath.

Elizabeth was up at break of day, she would take a shower bath, then would have a cup of soup—of boiled essence of beef, chicken, roebuck and partridge, then two glasses of wine. After that, with the help of a hairdresser, a tailor and a maid, she dressed. The long braids must be rolled closely around her head; to these a small top hat was securely fastened. The tailor had to sew in place the skirt of her habit to the tight bodice so that the effect was of a second skin. Another job was to lace the high boots with their tiny spurs. She always wore, when riding, three pairs of gloves—one over the other—the last being a pair of fancy gauntlets. A fan had to be slipped into her saddlebag, then she was off to the meet with the cheery Bay Middleton riding alongside at breakneck speed. *En route* they would stop for a sandwich and a glass of wine. Then, once more—over the moors to the song of morning birds, the creak of leather, and the thud of hoofbeats on the soft and springy turf—they would gallop to join the hunt.

There rides Lord Spencer, the Viceroy of all Ireland; there is Prince Rudolf Lichtenstein; there, Countess Trani. A baying of hounds, and they have found a hot scent. The chase begins. The riders are in a mad dash—the hounds ahead. Elizabeth too is ahead—well to the fore. Her horse, Jupiter, has his head and is not wasting his freedom. Bay's horse shies, is left behind. The Scotsman curses under his breath. Down the field—over a ditch—a hedge, they gallop. Now into the woods. The hounds are yelping excitedly. The dew is whipped from fragrant leaves—water is splashing saddle high and Elizabeth is outpacing every one—far ahead.

The fox hies himself over the wall of Maynooth College, a school for young priests. Through the exercise ground it flees. The hounds are baffled. Elizabeth clears the wall prettily. But the fox has escaped. Elizabeth reins in abruptly. The neophytes' eyes pop with incredulity.

What's this—a beautiful young woman in their midst sitting a foaming hunter? She was dripping wet—someone must go to her rescue! The young priests modestly turn their heads as Dr. Walsh, the principal, comes hurriedly to the scene. A woman in the sacred courtyard! Elizabeth disarms him with a smile.

"Have you a wrap for a soaking wet woman?"

"Ye-yes," he stutters.

She dismounts and reassuringly pats the quivering Jupiter.

"Won't you come into my office and have a cup of tea?" the rector invites with embarrassment, and then offers her a professor's long black robe.

"Thanks, that would be fine!"

After a cup of good hot tea, Elizabeth smiles again, and looking at her huge black robe, she asks:

"Do I get a doctor's degree with this?"

Whoever saw an Irish priest without a sense of humour? He enjoyed the pleasantry—they talked on

for a bit until Elizabeth asked him to send for her coach—and identified herself!

“Good God!” swoic a frantic Bay, “I could never have had another happy day in my life if you had been hurt!”

He had been the first to spot the Empress’s coach and came dashing madly to see if all was well.

“How is that—you have only known me a few days,” Elizabeth laughed.

“Sure and it only takes the likes o’ me one minute to fall in love—and to worship—for life!”

The rest of the party clattered up to them. Elizabeth told her story.

Next day Dr. Walsh was presented with a diamond ring for his kindness to Her Majesty the Empress. The college was richer by a magnificent statue of St. George and the Dragon and a new set of vestments. In the quaint old academy of Maynooth for many decades the name of Empress Elizabeth was spoken in reverence.

“Look, Bay—a new moon! I saw it over my left shoulder—now I can make a wish!”

“Make a wish for me too, darling—a wish that we will have many a season of this happiness together.”

Her Majesty was superstitious, no doubt of that, and when Bay saw Elizabeth bow three times to a magpie a little later, he said:

“No Irish woman was ever more superstitious than you—my dear.”

“Can’t help it, Bay—it may be silly, but it’s irresistible. I always pick up nails or horseshoes whenever I see them—cold iron is lucky, you know!”

“Then I’m going to have an iron ring made for you

—and inscribe it to the most wonderful sweetheart a man ever had!"

Elizabeth wore the ring on a slender chain about her wrist—she never wore finger-rings as, in her opinion, they marred her hands.

Of all her loves, this was the only unsuitable one in Elizabeth's life.

Back from her first visit in Ireland she paid a visit to the Hofburg—she caught bronchitis and rushed to Possenhofen to her father while still supposedly under the doctor's care.

Duke Max was explosive.

"Get those fellows the hell out of your way, Sisi," he said, alluding to Court doctors and their treatments.

"The best doctors in the world are Dr. Diet, Dr. Quiet, and Dr. Merryman," he quoted Swift.

"Well, I've certainly found Dr. Merryman," she confided.

"Who is he, Liebling?"

"Bay Middleton. He's a Scotch-Irish lad—one has to be gay and carefree around him! He's the playboy of the Irish moors—wonderful!"

"Let's see you, Sisi—stand up over there. I want to look at you."

He examined her as he did his horses. "Well, fine ankles—good slender legs—shapely. Fine form—hips and waist slim. Face firm, no wrinkles or fat—damn pretty too. Hm-mmm, I'll give you the age of twenty-eight!"

"Why, darling—that's just what Bay says."

"Just goes to show you, Sisi, as I used to tell you when you were a youngster, women who take care of themselves—the right kind of exercise—diet—mental attitude, don't have to ring up their ages like a miserable accountant must do!"

"Thank God for that, Poppie, do you realize that it is just forty-two years since—I was born—to be exact——?"

"Oh, to hell with exactness—I knock a score of years off my own age when I go incognito to Paris—or elsewhere for my little sprees."

The old Wittelsbach spirit!

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There were delightful, intimate suppers at the Hofburg in Elizabeth's private apartments—long after most of the other occupants were deep in slumber. At these parties were Count Herbert Bismarck, Countess Marie Lerish, Nicky Esterhazy—and Bay, who had a room in the palace, although Franz Joseph never approved of it.

Bay often went to Elizabeth's gymnasium in the Hofburg—while she took her fencing lesson.

"Lovely thing," he would say, "I could watch you forever!"

Wearing a short grey skirt and a little coat of mail she went through her paces.

Herr Schueltzer, the fencing instructor, declared she was a marvel.

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Elizabeth's maintenance budget was truly fit for an Empress. On her journeys away from home she received an allowance of 56,000 gulden monthly, about \$25,000. Her normal allowance was 200,000 gulden yearly paid in monthly instalments.

At this time, a young Viennese boy could take his girl to the Prater for dinner, ride the merry-go-rounds, get pink lemonade—or beer, see the living skeleton and all the attractions, and have enough left for fare home.

But Elizabeth was not once able to make her allowance do. In the marriage contract provision was made

for Elizabeth's widowhood—100,000 gulden yearly. Franz Joseph understood that this would never be sufficient for Elizabeth. In 1875 he trebled the amount. And despite this there is no record of the taxpayers ever complaining of the extravagance of their Empress.

Her charitable works were well known—she endowed hospitals, schools, cheap restaurants for the poor, but she spent fortunes upon her frivolities and personal luxuries.

She had once told King Ludwig that she would raise a temple to the Greeks—and she had built a palace in Corfu to satisfy this whim.

“If I can no longer build—I can no longer live!” Ludwig said.

“If I can no longer love—I can no longer live!” said Elizabeth.

She commanded the architect to build her villa (it was really a palace) on the side of a hill, above the road that runs along the seashore from Corfu to the town of *Gesturi en Benesse*. She named it “ACHILLEION.” It cost a fortune. The architect swindled her on “real” marble. The place was pretentious, yet comfortable.

With the exception of the Empress's own bedroom and bath the interior was expensively done—which is about all that could be said for it. Obvious imitations of the antique—excusable almost any place but in Greece—were testimonials to the swindle. Her bedroom was supposed to be a copy of the immortal Helen of Troy's. Standing but a few inches from the floor, the unusually broad Greek bed was covered with orchid-coloured brocade, with an “E” and crown in the corner. Slender bending nymphs served for bed-posts. One large chair, inlaid with silver and ebony, was half covered with a huge sheep-skin. Two large blue vases stood on carved pillars. There was no other furniture in the room.

All the carpets, rugs, tapestries and lamps Elizabeth had bought herself, in Morocco and Tunis. A luxurious bathroom showed Elizabeth still the Hedonist. A combination of the glory of ancient Rome and the comfort of modern America!

On the right side of the entrance hall a small room was fitted up as a chapel. Here Elizabeth had placed a sweet-faced Madonna she had bought in Marseilles—the protectress of all seafarers—"Notre Dame de la Garde." Not far from the chapel were statues of Elizabeth's other gods—Venus, Artemis and Apollo!

From the terrace a view was had of Gasturi and Ajideba, that tiny ancient town sprawling on the side of the hill sloping down to the sea. In the garden was a grove of olive trees, sentinel-like cypresses she loved so well, and beds of hyacinths, roses and magnolias. Here stood a black satyr carrying the boy Dionysus on his shoulders.

In a nearby rose arbour a statue of the poet Heine, inscribed with stanzas of his "Solitary Dreams." Guarding a flower-bed stood Peri, the mythical fairy of light—gliding over the bronze waves on the wings of a swan! Below the *escalier* was a stalactite grotto.

Although theatrical—and almost absurd by day, it was effective in the moonlight. An arrangement of mirrors within its depths reflected the sea. She called it her "Calypso" Grotto.

The stables were large and roomy—had pictures of her favourite horses, Sir Lancelot and Black Pearl, on its walls.

Under Bay Middleton's direction everything pertaining to the stables was brought from England. Even the wainscoting in light oak which lined the coach-houses and the saddle-rooms were imported from England.

The many gables, pointed roofs, latticed windows were soon overgrown with creeper and climbing roses. A road led through the gardens to the stables—lined

with beds of pink and white geraniums, camellias, azaleas and monster ferns. It was fantastic enough to be a real dreamland.

It was the spring of 1883.

Elizabeth's liaison with Bay Middleton had lasted four years. Each year they had gone for the hunting season to Ireland, or England—then around the compass to many ports—Corfu, Algeria, Paris or Vienna.

Bay accompanied the Empress when bear-cub hunting in Hungary. Here in her palace, "Godollo," she maintained a circus—a miniature one—where Bay often served as ring-master, shouting "Bravos" as the Empress rode her little white Arab pony around the ring.

Elizabeth floated on clouds with her lovers. If they fell off the cloud—they fell out of her life, forever. In the case of Bay Middleton it must have been an effervescent humour that kept him high—high in the sky. Bay was clever and amusing, and did manage to stay up in the heavens a very long time with Elizabeth, who was undoubtedly a woman who used her lovers as props on which to hang her own ideals—and moods.

One day at Godollo, Bay took leave of the Empress.

"Must have a look at Pest!" he explained.

The Empress sent one of the custodians of the palace to accompany him—and bring him back. Hours sped by. No Bay. Elizabeth nervously paced the floor. She was worried. His temper must have got him into difficulties. Finally the custodian returned—alone—a shamefaced fellow who explained:

"Captain Middleton went off on his own—he promised to meet me later at the Casino. I waited and waited—but he never came." . . . Yes, the Captain

drank a lot of Tokay wine—there was a gypsy encampment near by—some pretty girls—

“ Merciful Heaven ! ” moaned the Empress.

Countess Ferenzy and young Marie Larish remained up all night to comfort Her Majesty.

In a clinging night-robe—little jewelled slippers—hair hanging in a velvety, fragrant mantle, she went to the window countless times. Occasionally, she stopped to look at herself in the mirror. Was she losing her beauty? Was she no longer desirable? Strange thought, for Elizabeth.

Morning came, bleak and cold. A telegram from Bay! He was at the moment in the police station! When the wandering cavalier returned to the fold he looked a bit the worse for wear. In fact, he looked as if he had been in a battle, and wore by way of decoration one very black eye!

According to his story, he had fallen foul of a band of thieves who had left him penniless—so there was nothing left to do but go to the police.

That afternoon Count Julius Andrassy called. For an hour he and Elizabeth were closeted in her studio. Among other things, he informed her of the evolutionary process of Bay's black eye. It had come from the horny fist of the husband of the young gypsy woman with whom Bay had spent the night! Andrassy laid his hand upon Elizabeth's and asked:

“ Do you really love this man ? ”

“ I'm afraid I've been a fool. I know I don't love him—but I did love the fun—the gay energy that Bay represents. There—there is only one man in the world I love, only one ! ”

Elizabeth and Andrassy understood each other. He would be to her the one real love of her life.

“ I have come to-day, Elizabeth—not to run with you as I have through all these years—but to head you

off! Another year of this sort of life would break you, darling. I beg of you, beware——”

“I know. My race is run. I am forty-six. It cannot last much longer!”

“You are twenty-nine in my eyes, as you were when we met each other, and so you will always remain—to me. But remember, I am not the world, darling.”

Elizabeth and Bay Middleton were riding together late the same afternoon. A storm had come and gone and left a rainbow in the sky.

“Look, Bay,” she pointed with her whip. “It’s luck for us—a rainbow!”

“Sure it’s a beauty!”

“Like the way your black eye will look to-morrow!”

She laughed and recited Byron:

“It changed, of course ; a heavenly chameleon,
The airy child of vapour and the sun,
Brought forth in purple, cradled in vermillion,
Baptized in molten gold, and swathed in dun,
Glittering like crescents o’er a Turk’s pavilion
And blending every colour into one,
Just like a black eye in a recent scuffle,
(For sometimes we must box without a muffle)!”

“That fellow Byron’s life must have been just one black eye after another!” ejaculated Bay.

“That is what you both get for being so attractive,” smiled Elizabeth.

A bit too subtle for Bay. He flushed slightly. Had he overstepped his mark? He said nothing. She continued:

“I am leaving for Corfu to-morrow—and we must say good-bye—to-day!”

Bay was now baffled. All his artistry was called into play. He tried to dissuade her. He pleaded. In desperation, he confessed and begged forgiveness—in vain

" Let me at least see you alone once more. I'll go back to Ireland in the morning. But for God's sake don't say this is good-bye ! "

Elizabeth—still smiling—looked straight into his eyes, her little chin was firm. No quiver in that curved mouth.

" It is good-bye to you, Bay," she said slowly, " and it's good-bye to my heroic years ! "

PART THREE

Tired Wings

C H A P T E R I

“ ACHILLES ”

“ The Isles of Greece, the Isles of Greece !
 Where burning Sappho loved and sung,
Where grew the arts of war and peace—
 Where Delos rose, and Phœbus sprung ! ”

BYRON.

The Mountain Eagle had released himself from his earthly cage to soar high above the clouds on proud wings. The Dove was left to sorrow.

Elizabeth had a premonition that something was wrong with Ludwig. Was he trying to send her a message as he had before—by telepathy? She was in Possenhofen, and hastened to him. Then she learned of his sudden flight—his suicide by drowning in the Lake of Starnberg.

She had arrived on the scene but a few hours after the tragedy—or, as she tried to think, the blessing. She had asked to see his body—had dismissed the attendants—had taken Ludwig's lifeless form in her arms—the last embrace. Then she laid a rose in the long, artistic fingers—and fled.

Andrassy and Elizabeth, together at Achilleion Villa. Shortly after she left for Corfu, Count Andrassy had been informed Her Majesty's nerves were shattered.

He came to her. He tried to comfort her.

Together they would sit or walk into the garden.

Far out into the night they would talk. The palace, the garden, the sea would be flooded in moonlight. Dimly the mountains of Albania loomed in the distance. The night that Andrassy arrived they walked past the pavilion—along a fragrant path close lined with blossoms and foliage, where enchanted folk seemed to dance. There were marble wood-nymphs . . . a bronze centaur . . . a drunken fawn. The path led to a terrace—to a life-sized statue of the “Dying Achilles.” There they sat silently—hours it seemed. Their thoughts deep in the shadows—they were near to each other this night.

Elizabeth’s thoughts were of Ludwig. Just three months ago—and now the ærie empty! Somehow she could not forget the expression on the face of that strange, tall boy—pain, contempt—but still discernible—a trace of the tender smile that had been his tribute to her—his Dove.

“What is it, darling—brooding over him again?”
Andrassy’s voice came strong and soothing.

“I cannot help it—Ludwig keeps returning.”

“You must lean on me—let me help you.”

“You have, dearest—God knows you have. These days would be unbearable without you!”

The melancholy romance that enfolded Corfu struck some chord in Elizabeth’s spirit—rhymed with the depths of a mood which had grown within her—in tune with the vanished actors on this stage of Grecian drama. Byron came forth from the ruins—as he had once lived for her in his poetry. He shared a niche with Heine in her house of personal gods—many of his original manuscripts joined their spirits closer. And Byron had gone to Greece—ready to sacrifice everything to her cause—had succeeded only in dying there.

Byron had said of Greece as he lay upon his cot

awaiting the summons of death a scant few hours away,
“ I have given her my time, my means, my health;
and now I give her my life—what could I do more? ”

She and Byron had worshipped the flight of freedom—but Greece could not mean the escape for her that it had for him.

A miserable, jaundiced little Jew walked in, shambling-eyed her and Byron there.

“ So you’ve come, Heine,” she said.

“ Yes, Elizabeth—I found the Paris gutters too friendly to poets.”

“ But,” said Byron, “ you’ll find scarce better accommodations on these Grecian shores.”

“ You see,” said Elizabeth, “ earth has ever despised us rebels. I only wish that we three might build our own universe! ”

“ We have,” chimed Heine and Byron in unison.

Almost wearily Elizabeth turned her pale face away—walked slowly across a field of tall daisies.

“ Come to Hungary, Elizabeth. Corfu is no place for you now,” Andrassy pleaded.

He had watched the queen flower wilt beneath Achilleion’s pitiless sun. His own heart longed for his homeland.

“ Come to Hungary,” he begged, “ to my villa in the hills—the sun-clad hills—our own Tokay vineyards! Autumn has always been your favourite season there. I will dismiss all the servants—prepare your meals myself—as I did upon our last stay there. And we will ride at dawn and twilight—as you’ve always loved to do! ”

“ As you will, dear—I place myself in your hands. Let us go to the land I love. You and I—we’ll leave to-morrow—slow sailing on the *Miramar*. ”

A CAGED BIRD

" On board the *Miramar*,
" September, 1886.

" Life on board ship is more than mere moving from place to place; it is a better sort of life. It is like living on an island from which all that is unpleasant and all social lies are banished. It is a crystallization of life, chemically pure, free from the time-sensation. The feeling of time is always melancholy."

Elizabeth's ode to the sea.

CHAPTER II

ECLIPSE

Duke Max was eighty-one and his strength began to fail. At the first sign of his waning health Elizabeth rushed to his side.

The gay, beloved old philanderer, despite his doctor's orders, insisted on remaining in his regular quarters, damp and improperly heated, separated by long halls and corridors from the more cozy apartment of Ludoveca, in Possenhofen Castle.

For three weeks he was ill—and all that time Elizabeth was at his bedside, even sleeping nights on a cot in this stone-floored, unhealthy room. Duke Max hated pampering, prided himself on his physique—and there had been times when both he and Elizabeth would sleep outdoors at night, in cold and rain, without ill effect. But those ways were past. For her heroism Elizabeth was to contract sciatica, from which she would suffer the rest of her life. As for Duke Max—a stroke of paralysis did what wild horses, women, excess had failed to do—reduced him to a state of complete helplessness. Three days more he lingered. His last gesture was a sporting one. “Don’t worry about me, my wildling,” he said. “Why, just think what a great life I’ve had ! ”

“Sisi,” he moaned softly, and died. It was November 14, 1888.

It was New Year’s Day in 1889. Elizabeth was back at the Hofburg, a broken Elizabeth, sick in mind and

body. From the privations of her long vigil, the damp room—the suffering with suffering—her splendid health had given way.

Inflammation of the nerves—dilation of the heart—physicians told her. What they could not diagnose was her sickness of spirit.

"I'll always be brave—have courage," she had once told Duke Max, "as long as I have you!"

Now he was gone—gone with his zither on his back, rollicking tune on his lips—over the hills to the shepherd's cottage—on through the meadows with Petzmacher—to the never-never land—

Elizabeth turned her eyes from the dismal sun that straggled through the windows to work a pattern of bars on the carpet. She fled the room—fled to her tiny sanctuary to pray.

The chapel was walled with alabaster—delicately carved alabaster formed the altar. Above hung a crucifix of onyx and silver. Back of two small vases filled with snow-white lilies two candles burned in golden holders, perfumed candles—giving life to this niche of sorrow. The candles shone on the Triptych of Lucas von Cranach.

Elizabeth lost herself in contemplation—the beauty of the Triptych mingling with her anguish.

All three children of Elizabeth and Franz Joseph were married. Gazela was Princess Leopold of Bavaria. Valerie the wife of Archduke Franz Salvator Toskana, and Rudolf had married Princess Stephanie of Belgium. For seven years he and his bride had lived unhappily. Stephanie was big and blonde—the Court said she was ungainly. Rudolf didn't like her. Franz Joseph denied his son a liberty he had taken himself despite imperial necessity—the right to choose his wife among the eligibles. Franz Joseph had been

dogmatic about the match, fumbling as usual the reins of dynasty.

Elizabeth from the start was sadly resigned to the marriage. She realized anything she did to stop it would be futile and only cause more pain for everybody concerned.

Although Elizabeth sympathized with her son in his miserable mismating, she did not let Stephanie feel the sting. She had remembered too well the torture she had suffered at the hands of an officious mother-in-law, who likewise had considered her son mismated. She played the part of a friend to Stephanie—who, after all, was just another pawn in the imperial machine.

Stephanie had given birth to a golden-haired girl who was named Elizabeth. Valerie and Gazela also had children. Elizabeth a grandmother.

The Court had other names than "grandmother" for Elizabeth—almost under the Emperor's nose they sniffed virtuously, "Andrassy's mistress!"

Franz Joseph, however, adopted the attitude that the King or Queen could do no wrong. He himself was involved with a handsome young actress from the Burg Theatre.

Now that Duke Max was gone she turned to the one great love of her life—Andrassy.

His tenderness and understanding were Elizabeth's comfort in this heartrending period of her life. He was her pilot on the dark and stormy seas of sorrow.

"He is my evening star," she wrote. "He guides me in the darkness of my life!"

He shared with her a craving for beauty. He satisfied her longing for romance. With him she could talk and in him found wisdom.

Andrassy understood Rudolf well—almost as well as Elizabeth.

"The liberal in your boy has triumphed in spite of all," he told her. "I hope it will not get him into trouble—you know, darling—he is already deeply involved with the Liberal Party."

"I know, I have watched him with anxiety," Elizabeth said. "And the danger is that Franz does not understand Rudolf at all."

"Because he is so like you, Elizabeth—brilliant and eager to drink deep of the cup of life!"

Rudolf was finding life unbearable. His impulsive nature had been caged—but never tamed.

He gave expression to the fester in his heart in a letter written to his former tutor on his thirtieth birthday.

"Thirty is an epoch in one's life, and none too cheerful a one; much time has passed, more or less usefully employed, but barren of real deeds and successes. We live in a tedious, stagnating age. And from to-day every year makes me older, less alert and less effective; for this eternal business of preparation and this constant waiting wears out one's powers of action. If our hopes, and your expectations of me, are to be fulfilled, the most fortunate thing that can happen to us will be a great war——"

Rudolf resembled his mother. He was handsome in a compelling way—clever and well read. He was a scholar, a linguist—an ornament to Society if need be.

But his personal preference lay along lines of lonely shooting expeditions with no other companion than a silent forester. He liked to stalk the huge breed of bear in the Transylvanian Alps. He despised the methods of his father, who would have game almost corralled before being shot. Unless the game had a

chance to attack, or escape, it was not his idea of shooting. Since boyhood he had courted death.

Rudolf's liberalism spelled hope and promise to many of the better minds of Vienna. Fianz Joseph couldn't last forever. If he did last too long, perhaps something could be done?

Szeps, editor of the *Neues Wiener Tageblatt*, was a leader among the Liberals. He shared Rudolf's conviction that William would be a destructive Emperor for Germany—dynasty and country would be ruined. Again Austria's day might dawn—with the right man at the helm—

Szeps, a clever, intelligent Jew, had a great success with a Liberal newspaper in these autocratic times. With destructive accuracy he scooped political manoeuvres at their crisis. His information came from the brilliant brain of the Crown Prince!

His Highness, however, was "loyal" to the Crown. When Szeps proposed a dethronement and usurpation, which would have changed the course of Central European history, the Crown Prince refused. He even was loyal enough to tell his father. Rudolf had different ideas in regard to Hungary. "This constant waiting—was intolerable." Here he toyed with the idea of action "deeds and successes."

Loyalty to the Crown was one thing. Loyalty to a forced marriage was another. Rudolf in this respect was no better or worse than his parents.

Love, the nemesis, pursued and caught him—a victim deprived of all weapons of defence. She was seventeen—of good family—and very beautiful. She had little, if any, experience in the world of men—this

Baroness Marie Vetsera. She was half Greek. Her temperament was warm.

Rudolf's love for her was overpowering. He sent a confidential letter to the Pope, imploring that his marriage be dissolved, that Roman influence be used with the Emperor to secure his consent to a renunciation of all rights to the throne.

The Pope betrayed Rudolf's confidence and immediately informed Franz Joseph.

Franz Joseph would not grant to his son what he had forced from his brother—and at a time fraught with scarce less danger for the Imperial head. Behind closed doors the monarch read the rules of dynasty.

Elizabeth was not unmindful of the tragic course her son's life threatened to take. She had watched with painful anguish the swift developments in the case. She knew that Stephanie had appealed to the Jesuit Father Bernsdorf in the Jesuit Monastery in the Street of the Bernadines. She knew that Stephanie had begun a rigorous beauty cure—enlisting the aid of French beauty experts. And Paris dressmakers were kept busy with her orders for clothes.

In vain, for neither this nor the four-year-old Elizabeth could halt Rudolf in his mad pursuit of a rainbow. A novena was said by all the Jesuit priests and students that a new son and heir be born to the ancient House of Hapsburg. Elizabeth had smiled bitterly—stroked her granddaughter's golden locks—then nervously left the nursery almost as quickly as she had come.

She made her way to Rudolf's private office in the Hofburg—a cosy room with Persian rugs on the floor, comfortable chairs, a divan with pillows. Wittelsbachian like, a human skull stared grotesquely from its resting-place on Rudolf's desk. Rudolf was not

there. His valet, the trusted Loschek, for four years Rudolf's faithful servant, took the note for his master.

"My darling boy," it ran, "it is days since I have seen you. I am anxious about your health, your nerves. Please come to me—as soon—as soon as possible. Your own adoring Mama."

"If you love her, Rudolf," his mother had said to him, "then I love her too! Please send her to me. I want to tell her that."

A frightened Marie was ushered into Her Majesty's suite. Past the lovely white drawing-room, past an ugly Victorian dining-room, into a boudoir—Biedermeier furniture, Burgundy hangings—she walked.

Then a low, singing voice from the dressing-room called, "Come in!"

Marie entered. Blinds were drawn. A soft light came from shaded lamps. An enormous toilet table was laden with crystal and silver. On a chaise-longue covered with a silky white fur rug reclined Elizabeth.

"My child, I am a bit indisposed—please come close to me. I want to talk to you. I have sent for you because Rudolf tells me you are so beautiful. And now I see that he was right!"

"Your Majesty, I——"

"I understand, my dear—Rudolf has told me all." Elizabeth reached over and touched her.

"How pretty you are—Marie!"

She stroked the dimpled hand.

"How nice—how young—I knew Rudolf's love was very sweet."

"Y-your Majesty," she managed, stifling her confusion with difficulty, "is more beautiful than I had thought—from seeing you at a distance—and from the picture that Rudi always carries!"

"I want you to remember, darling child, that Rudolf's mother loves you too—God bless you!"

A CAGED BIRD

" It was like talking to a strange, beautiful vision," Baroness Vetsera wrote to her sister.

Crown Prince Rudolf and Baroness Marie Vetsera were found dead in His Highness's shooting box at Mayerling on January 30, 1889. A double suicide. Franz Joseph immediately sent out a cordon of secret police to hush the tragedy. The news spread by devious ways, gaining momentum and exaggeration as it went. An official communiqué announced that Rudolf had been killed in a hunting accident.

The news was received as a great national tragedy and Elizabeth received the news bravely, but she was never to recover from the shock.

Frau Vetsera, mother of Marie, sent Elizabeth her daughter's last messages—letters to her brother, her mother, and her sister. They read:

" Good-bye, dear brother, I will keep watch over you from the other world, for I love you dearly.

" Your devoted sister."

" DEAR MOTHER,

" Forgive me for what I have done. I cannot resist love. I wish to be buried at his side in the cemetery at Alland. I am happier in death than in life."

" DEAR SISTER,

" We are leaving joyfully for the life beyond the grave. Think of me sometimes and do not marry except for love. I have not been able to do so and as I cannot resist love I am going with him.

" MARIE.

" P.S.—Do not grieve, I am happy. The country here is magnificent and reminds me of Schwarzau. Do you remember the life line on my hand? Good-bye once more. On the thirteenth of January every year lay a flower on my grave."

Elizabeth returned these letters accompanied with a photograph of Mayerling, having a cross marked in ink on one of the windows.

Rudolf's last message to her had been a note with this photograph saying: "When you receive this I'll be dead."

Elizabeth herself respected the pitiful request in Marie's letter, and every "thirteenth of January" laid a white, fragrant flower on the grave. After considerable effort on Elizabeth's part her grave was changed to consecrated ground in that flowery country cemetery not far from Mayerling. It is still beautifully preserved . . . and beside it are the graves of two boys, so affected by the tragedy of Marie's death and the accounts of her beauty, that they committed suicide on it with the request that they be buried near her.

The "thirteenth of January" was the date memorable to Baroness Vetsera . . . it was the date that she first gave herself to Rudolf, although she had met him before.

Franz Joseph accepted this tragedy as he accepted all tragedies in his life . . . as the work of a God whose days were inscrutable and yet for the good of the world. His knowledge of Rudolf's probable intrigues with the enemies of Franz Joseph in Hungary possibly made it appear as divine punishment. But there are many who saw in the death of the Crown Prince the exaction of a curse. Franz Joseph had and was suffering through those most dear to him.

Elizabeth's heart was broken. There was no doubt that that, even more than the death of Duke Max, was the real tragedy in her life.

Rudolf had taken the "cowardly" way out; she had often thought of death as escape, but never death by her own hand. Rudolf was her duty to the Monarchy. She had suffered to bring him into the world, had suffered for him, but had been joyous in this suffering in the conviction that he would some day become a

great man and Monarch. Now her very reason for existence seemed gone.

No love, no interest, no responsibility, nothing ever diverted Elizabeth from the tragedy of Rudolf's suicide.

CHAPTER III

THE HOLY GRAIL

The years moved swiftly, silently—the Dove was in caged flight. Forth—to search for freedom in a frenzy that denied nothing but the impossibility of ever achieving it. No longer was Elizabeth escaping from Court parties at Possenhofen, or an officious mother-in-law—or the red breeches of the Emperor, or the restraint of Court life. All Elizabeth's escapes were nothing more than escape from her own temperament—her own reactions towards people and things—in short, escape from herself.

As before, escape meant to move—anywhere. There were short cruises with the Emperor on his yacht, the *Greif*—listening to the music of a Hungarian orchestra His Majesty had ordered for her pleasure—to Cape Martin, visiting the elegant and picturesque old Empress Eugenie—leasing a villa next to her. Napoleon III was dead and so was their only son. Eugenie was no longer Empress of the French. Another dynasty had crumbled.

Paleologue, in his *Tragic Empress*, reviews Eugenie's last days as monarch.

"On November 18, 1869, the inauguration of the Suez Canal in the waters of Ismailia. Egyptian sky—light of enchantment—resplendence as of dreams. Emperor and Empress are awaited by fifty vessels—all beflagged—at the entrance to Lake Timsa. Their yacht *l'Aigle* took the head of the procession and the

yachts of the Khedive, the Prince Royal of Prussia, Prince Henry of the Netherlands, and Emperor Franz Joseph of Austria followed at less than a cable's length. The spectacle was so superbly magnificent and proclaimed so proudly the greatness of the French régime that no one ever dreamcd the proud Emperor Napoleon III and the beautiful Empress Eugenie would one year later be dethroned."

As Ludwig had prophesied, Elizabeth remained eternally young and beautiful. Woman-like, she feared the ravages of time and her rigorous beauty culture saw no let-up. She took her exercises daily. She drank a half-pint of ox-blood every afternoon—to maintain her strength. The natural beauty of her hair was to remain with her until her death. With the expert care of her coiffeur it grew luxuriously in long braids she wound cleverly about the delicate temples to cover the first touches of grey.

She used the natural cream of cows for her face cream; leaving it to sink deeply into the pores. Then she used a lotion of stiffly beaten whites of eggs into which was mixed olive oil—her astringent. When this process had made the skin taut and firm—she removed the preparation with a cream made from Holland lily bulbs—her own recipe. What was flattery for most women was with Elizabeth simple truth—she never looked physically older than thirty.

"The Evening Star" was gone—fallen from the sky—Count Andrassy was dead. No longer did its brilliance lead Elizabeth along dark paths.

Duke Max—Ludwig—Rudolf—and now Andrassy—father, friend, son and lover—all were gone, leaving Elizabeth to mourn their passing. Franz Joseph—though he and all Europe had known of the relation-

ship between his wife and Andrassy for the last twenty-five years—mourned his death deeply and sincerely. Austria—and he himself—had lost a faithful friend.

Elizabeth's grief was inconsolable. Travel was futile. She shut herself off from the world—went into strict retirement at Godollo—Godollo, where the spirits of three lovers kept her company. Alone, in silence—she walked her Calvary. To her sister, Duchess Alençon, she wrote:

"Every human being goes through one day on which his soul dies; he goes on living, but only the body is alive. No joys nor griefs can touch him after that."

And again:

"I should like to vanish from the world like a bird that flies away, or like smoke that melts before our eyes into nothing."

The Church now was her only consolation. She went to Mass—when the mood willed. More often she sought the privacy of her own tiny chapel. Here was a new spiritual development in Elizabeth. She was beginning to discover, like Sir Launcelot, that within herself she could find her Holy Grail. With a new tolerance in her eyes, another veil over her face, Elizabeth began her twilight reveries.

Elizabeth's spirit now required solitude. In all the fourteen hundred rooms of Schoenbrunn Palace she had not the isolation she desired. Elizabeth ordered an architect to construct a palace in Lainz—a small one, Renaissance.

At Lainz—a scheduled spot courting forest and hills—a short mile from Schoenbrunn, the workmen built a rather ornate structure—long and narrow—done ostensibly in the Renaissance style—ostensibly—for the architect slipped.

A hallway from the front entrance led to two huge glass doors at the rear from which Elizabeth liked to gaze at the surrounding hills, precincts used as the

Court game preserves and full of wild boar, deer and lesser forest folk.

The salon had walls and furniture of ivory shade. Silky white rugs—Elizabeth had a weakness for these—covered the floor. Windows were hung with Alençon lace and deep ivory-coloured curtains. An alabaster statue of a weeping Niobe stood in one window. The all-year dampness of the region was neutralized by a huge fireplace in which logs were constantly burning. In the courtyard was a statue of the Belvedere Mercury, surrounded by great clusters of snowy azaleas and white camellias. Flowers were arranged in the rooms by Elizabeth in her “quaint fashion.” She understood the art of arranging flowers almost as well as the Japanese.

Lainz—the Hermes Villa—was her retreat—it remained so until her death. Forty years later it blushes unseen—in the middle of a golf course!

Elizabeth's isolation did not mean that the wants of His Majesty were neglected. He was better cared for than ever. One woman had been found who would play the part in his life that Andrassy had played in the life of Elizabeth. She was Kathie Schratt, a former comédienne of the Burg Theatre. Twenty years younger than the Emperor, she had all the amiability and cosy charm denoted by “*Gemuellichkeit*.” A plump, full-breasted beauty of the Kremsier type, she remained Franz Joseph's “*freundin*” until his burial in the Capuchin crypt thirty-four years later.

Elizabeth became a rather “intimate” friend of “Die Schratt.” Elizabeth was undoubtedly sincerely grateful to Frau Schratt for her devotion and her evident understanding of the Emperor's needs. It had been something the Empress had never been able to do.

They were a strange pair, Empress Elizabeth and

the actress Kathie Schratt! They took long walks together. They had in common a love of animals, theories of reincarnation and an understanding of the theatre.

Elizabeth often invited both Franz Joseph and "Kathie" to dine with her in Lainz. A rare combination—a friendly triangle!

On such occasions the Emperor would notify Frau Schratt by telegram:

"Exp. 11/6 1894. 11.30 a.m. The Empress invites you to lunch with us to-morrow at three o'clock. Please telegraph at once whether you will accept or not. Heartiest thanks for your letter.

"FRANZ JOSEPH."

At these lunches Gazela, Valerie and the royal grandchildren were sources of common interest. Otherwise Franz Joseph and Elizabeth lived as dignified neighbours.

Only twice after Rudolf's death did the Empress appear with the Emperor on official duty, and not once did she put aside her mourning. The Czar and Czarina of Russia made an official visit to Vienna.

The Hofburg was aglow. Men were in Court dress and military uniform. An endless string of carriages swelled their numbers with distinguished guests from all Europe.

The grand master of ceremonies, Count Kalman-Hunyadi, announced the arrival of Their Majesties by striking the floor of the throne-room with his jewelled wand of office. All eyes turned to Elizabeth. She was radiantly beautiful. On her small head was a diadem of black pearls and diamonds from which a veil of black gauze powdered with jet fell to the hem of her Court mantle. The tight, pointed bodice and the endless, fan-shaped train were of shimmery black chiffon velvet. Around her firm throat hung row after row of

black pearls. On her left shoulder was attached the "Stern Kreuz" decoration of diamonds. She carried a sheath of Russian and Parma violets in one hand—in the other an enormous black ostrich feather fan on whose handle was her crown in diamonds. Someone described her as "The Black Lily." The description became famous.

"So youthful did she look," wrote a lady-in-waiting, "that her contemporaries would have easily been taken for her seniors by at least twenty years!"

In May 1896 Hungary celebrated the millenary fête of St. Stephan. Elizabeth, still in deep mourning, was fifty-nine years old. The Hungarians begged her to come. She hesitated—then accepted. Hungary's Beautiful Providence sat beside the Emperor on the throne. The President of Parliament read her name. The crowd went wild with cheering.

"Elhen Erzébet!"

Their Queen! Minutes of pandemonium. Her Majesty tried to control her emotion and failed. Tears streamed down her face.

It was her farewell to Hungary.

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The "Black Lily" was a familiar figure to the people. She was careful in her choice of street wear. Her slender figure was fitted tightly into one of those short silk-lined black serge dresses created by the tailor—and which Elizabeth made afad in Austria. There was an inevitable parasol in winter—and an equally inevitable large black fan in summer. As the years progressed she carried both.

The eternally gaping and photographing populace pleased Elizabeth no more than during her first few years of married life. But like all human and sympathetic natures she was tactful—too kind and generous to give affront. When people annoyed—as they often

did—she fled—with the fan or parasol concealing her face.

She still walked—five hours a day, summer or winter, She always had had a gift for languages. Now with the aid of a young Greek professor, Dr. Christomanoas, she perfected herself in modern Greek.

Dr. Christomanoas was a likeable little fellow; a studious Greek philosopher teaching his native language at the University of Vienna at the time he became Elizabeth's tutor. He remained with her for three years. Their story is best told in a description he wrote following her death.

" When I was presented for the first time to Empress Elizabeth it was in the summer of 1890 at Schloss Lainz. I was requested to wait for Her Majesty in the gardens, which were a mass of wonderful blossoms and flowering trees. I had never seen the Empress and knew her only by her photographs and portraits, and I was, confessedly, filled with emotion at the idea that a long wished-for privilege was about to be mine. I sat on a branch under a great tulip tree, my heart beating rapidly with nervousness.

" Suddenly without a sound heralding her approach she stood before me—a slender, black-clad apparition. She held in one hand a white umbrella and in the other a large black fan—a charming smile of welcome upon her face.

" In spite of the fact that her pictures resembled her but scantily, it was not difficult to know it was indeed the Empress. I felt that I was in the presence of the most exquisite and perfect creature that had ever assumed a human form.

" I had the good fortune to be near the Empress for three years, and I have seen with her eyes the beauty of nature which she alone knew so well how to show me.

" She has made me feel greater admiration for nature—for the waves and mountains, for the forests and the

plains—made me feel the natural tie that binds lofty spirits into one—the tie of common love for melody and rhythm in life. She helped me comprehend the grand infinity of the ocean, the deep azure beauty of a summer sky, the intense charms of music and poetry. It has been enough happiness for one life to have basked in her sunshine.

“ Her subjects did not know her and never did her justice—for women so perfect as she are sure to be misunderstood. Indeed, a throne seems a lowly footstool for such an angel! She, however, chided me when I expressed that thought in her presence—told me she considered some parts of her duties as sovereign very dear—sacred.

“ She proved her sincerity by her many charitable acts—efforts to relieve misery—to plan new ways of helping the poor and afflicted throughout the whole realm.

“ She was a queen of grace and kind consideration. Pageant, pomp and ceremony she did not like—and when she did bedeck herself with the insignia of her lofty rank she was not made more beautiful by this priceless display of jewels—their magnificence and dazzling loveliness seemed a part of her. When I used to see her dainty, delicate figure silhouetting against the dark forest it reminded me of a slender cypress swaying in a cemetery of spirits. How young she still seemed—she who was already a grandmother! How clear and pure were the great eyes which revealed at times the touching simplicity of a child’s soul—eyes which in the valleys of this sad world of ours have shed so many tears.

“ Wherever she went she aroused enthusiasm; the peasants of the village of Gasturi, Corfu, where she built her magnificent palace dedicated to Achilles, all used to kneel in the dust when she approached, calling aloud in their melodious language: ‘ O Queen of Beauty, may God bless thy every step! ’ All heads

were uncovered when she passed, and the children who watched for her coming would run towards her with their hands full of blossoming orange and almond boughs. She adored everything that was beautiful.

"One day in Madeira a strikingly pretty peasant girl with amber skin, coral lips and raven-black hair presented Her Majesty with a cluster of crimson camellias. Elizabeth smiled and gave the girl a gold coin, saying to me afterwards, 'That is a cheap price to pay for gazing on such perfection of form and face.'

"Her enthusiasm for poetry and music was great. Her favourite bard was Heinrich Heine—she erected a monument to him in the gardens of Achilleion, and it was there she used to go and gaze at the Oriental stars shining through the silvery olive tree branches. She did not fear death—one day she said to me; 'When the love of life has forsaken one, Death has already put his cold hand on one's shoulder.' Another time when her yacht was battling heavy seas off the coast of Algeria she remarked: 'Are you ready to die, or do you think, like so many others, that death is a heroic gesture, difficult to accomplish well? As far as I am concerned it matters but little to me how and when I will really close my eyes forever—for there is in every earthly career a moment when one inwardly dies, and that need not be the time when actual death takes place. What is disagreeable is all this ceremony which surrounds our parting from our envelope of clay—a ceremony which the ancient Romans abandoned to their slaves. It is not pleasant, of course, to watch decrepitude advance upon us. As for myself, I await death at any moment, and you, who are a philosopher, ought to do the same.'

"A little later, however, when I approached the edge of a precipice towering high above the waves, she told me not to take her so seriously, saying with a laugh: 'It is not necessary for you to seek a poetical death, it is enough to inwardly die a fine death!'

" I could not help but admire this sunny soul which had familiarized itself with death and yet could live on, in peace—just as if she were going through a task which she loved only because she considered it in the light of a duty ! "

CHAPTER IV

"FREE"

Elizabeth was a poetess of life. Her poetry was of the immortal, fragile stuff that would not bear transcription—had it not been posterity would revere her work rather than her name. Names are fleeting—but the rhythm of Elizabeth's six decades lives wordlessly on. Of all the great hearts of her century not one had thrown over the courses of their existence such a charmed mantle of fantasy—such a spell of fate. The hawk motif ushered in maturity—it followed ruthlessly in her wake—motif of sad souls doomed to darkness. She resisted to the last.

In late summer, 1898, Elizabeth went to Switzerland. Accompanying her was an unknown young Englishman, who played the guitar and was a reciter of poetry. Elizabeth had met him two years before in Cairo, had liked him, and asked him to accompany her on a cruise aboard the *Miramar*. He followed, thereafter, in the tracks of her wandering feet.

For once the gossips were stumped. . . . They were inured to Elizabeth's love affairs, but this quiet, friendly companionship was a thing beyond their comprehension.

August 30 saw the Empress and her suite located at the Grand Hotel in Caux. Elizabeth was enthusiastic over her programme.

"We shall go to Bes-les-Bains, Roches de Nay and Evian," she informed the young Englishman. "We

shall visit my dear friend, the Baroness Rothschild, and see her lovely hot-houses. And what orchids she has there—almost as lovely as those Maxi had in Trieste ! Then we shall go to Pregny and Geneva."

But first, a walking tour in the woods by Caux. Along the forest fringes bordering the lake—studying her reflection—fan half-covering her face—she gazed intently at the slim contours of her body. A Royal Narcissus !

The mountains, the ripple of the wood springs—the air and beauty of the out-of-doors—these gave her peace and restfulness. Taking random trails the pair found a resting-place on a bower of moss-grown rocks. The Englishman read aloud Marion Crawford's novel *Corleone*.

The Empress busied herself with a basket of fruit she had brought along—fruit being a choice item of her diet. She took a large bunch of hot-house grapes in her hand—started eating—interrupted her companion.

" So good ! " she said. " You must have some. Here ! "

She bent forward. At that instant a hawk swooped from a tall pine tree—swooped so close its wing brushed her forehead—disappeared as swiftly as it had come. The grapes fell from her hand. The colour left her face. Then quickly the little smile came and faded as soon as it appeared.

Her companion sprang to his feet. The " Curse of the Hawk " was known to every one—too long had its wings darkened the House of Hapsburg not to have become a popular superstition. Barker tried to speak. Elizabeth cut him short.

" No, no—it is nothing—please continue reading."

" But you are so upset—"

" No—I am all right. After all, if something is going to happen it will happen ! " she smiled. " You seem more upset than I am ! "

“ I’m worried for you! ”

“ But you know my ideas about death. I have never been afraid of it! ”

There were tears in the young Englishman’s eyes. He said: “ When our time comes we must go.”

“ Yes, and I am ready—”

On the morning of September 9 Elizabeth left for Geneva.

With Countess Sztaray she set out for the Rothschild home. The hostess had exercised a considerable amount of tact in arranging for her Royal visitor. The Hapsburg flag was hauled down from its mast when it was reported that the Empress was visiting incognito as “ Mrs. Nicholson.” The three women lunched alone. A stringed orchestra played Wagner in Elizabeth’s honour in a distant salon.

Elizabeth was unusually gay—praised the music and the food—even asked that the menu be sent to the Emperor that he might show it to “ Kathie,” a connoisseur, she knew, of good cuisine. Glasses of champagne clinked cheerily.

Baroness Rothschild congratulated herself on the success of her party.

Next morning—September 10, 1898—

Elizabeth prepared to return to Caux.

It was nearing boat time. Her Majesty had an errand to do. She went to Baeckers, the musical instrument maker in the Rue Bonnivard, to buy a phonograph for her grandchildren, her daughter Valerie’s children. She walked with sprightly steps toward the shop and entered. Like a happy child she tried many records. She was thrilled.

She remembered that Ludwig and herself had often talked about a machine like the phonograph. At least this much had materialized in her day! It was a marvellous thing!

She listened to arias from Aida, Carmen, Rigoletto, Tannhauser. . . . Then Wagner—ah, there was nothing so noble as Wagnerian music!

"The best instrument in the shop, Monsieur Baecker, with twenty-four records, please. For the children, you know!"

With a friendly smile she left the shop, and returned to the waiting Countess Sztaray.

"My dear Irma," she exclaimed, "you simply must share this delicious fresh milk with me!"

Then they walked along the shore of the lake. Doves perched perkily on a wall.

"Too bad we have no crumbs for them," she said regretfully.

"Your Majesty, we had better hurry—it is getting late!"

With her parasol Elizabeth pointed to the trees.

"Look, Irma!" she said brightly. "The chestnut trees are in flower. There are chestnut trees at Schoenbrunn too—they flower twice a year. Franz writes that they are covered with blossoms now!"

The boat siren cut short her idyll.

"Your Majesty! There is the boat signal."

Suddenly from behind one of the chestnut trees a man sprang out.¹

He struck Elizabeth on the breast! Elizabeth sank to the ground.

"We must have no confusion," she said.

¹ Elizabeth's assassin was an anarchist named Luigi Lucceni. He had intended to kill the Duke of Orleans, but the Duke had left Geneva ahead of him. With an awl he had stabbed the Empress, a wound that scarcely left a trace of blood on the outside—internal haemorrhages ensuing after the space of a few minutes. The half-mad Italian tailor had no motive for the attack. He had merely taken the Empress as "second choice."

With a supreme effort she got to her feet. Her little head held nobly—

She walked straight—to the dock—on the gang-plank . . . on board.

“What has happened?” cried the dazed Countess. Already the boat is under way—for what shore?

“Majesty!” the Countess screamed.

Elizabeth fell in her companion’s arms—consciousness going swiftly. Her dress parted slightly—a tiny wound high on her breast—no larger than a shot-hole in the breast of a dove.

“Her Majesty is wounded!” cried the Countess.

Captain Roux hurriedly turned the boat back towards Geneva. Madame Dardelle, a passenger, dipped a piece of sugar in eau-de-cologne—forced it between Elizabeth’s lips. A cool breeze blew off the lake. Elizabeth’s eyelids fluttered—then opened.

“Merci,” she murmured.

Countess Sztaray supported the Empress against her shoulder. Elizabeth gazed vaguely at the sky.

“A rainbow!” she whispered.

Etched deeply in the transient colours of that rainbow was a kaleidoscope of Elizabeth’s past—companion of Elizabeth’s last moment . . . lovers—melting in the cauldron of the borderland between life and death into one great love—her dream children . . . mists and clouds of stormy years vanishing into rainbow crescents—peaceful shores of Corfu—of Godollo woods at twilight—Madeira—astride a quivering horse—alive—living—the bishop in long robes—Coronation Day in Pest—Andrassy—Rudolf—Rudolf gazing deep into her eyes—Marie—Valerie in her pony cart at Ischl—Duke Max—his laugh—his music—arms about her—sisters—Isle of Roses—Ludwig and the Swanboat—Ludwig and his prophecy—“Fly to me,” the Eagle said. “I’ll be waiting for you upon a mountain-top!”

Above the clouds. . . . The kaleidoscope whirled faster. Myriad red flags, Vienna windows——

Sophie——

Scarlet trousers——

Darkness.

"I'm afraid there is no hope at all," the doctor informed Countess Sztaray.

The wounded Dove was dead.

